

THE FATE OF
FOURTEEN
PACIFISTS
IN STALIN'S
UKRAINE,
1952–1953

CONSCIENCE ON TRIAL



Hiroaki Kuromiya

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The Fate of Fourteen Pacifists in Stalin's Ukraine,
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HIROAKI KUROMIYA

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CONSCIENCE ON TRIAL
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Prologue

Cuius regio, eius religio¹

WHAT the Soviet people thought under Stalin is a difficult question to answer. They could not speak freely. Nor were there free elections, free opinion polls, or a free press. To make matters worse, dissidence was artificially created by the police as a justification for terror. Innocent people were thus portrayed as ‘enemies of the people,’ and silence and dissimulation were a way of life.

Some years ago when I was thinking hard about ways to fathom the minds of the Soviet citizens living under Stalin’s rule, I chanced upon a criminal case of what then appeared to be a particularly compelling example of popular dissent. In December 1952, a mere few weeks before Stalin’s death in March 1953, fourteen Christian believers whom the police labelled ‘Reformed Adventists’ (or ‘Reformist Adventists’ [*adventisty-reformisty*]), a splinter group from the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, were tried secretly in Bila Tserkva, Ukraine. The charge was openly defying Soviet law, more specifically, taking and advocating a pacifist stance against universal military service. These Adventists were not famous people, in fact, to a man (or woman) they were poor, barely literate, and living on the margin of Soviet society without steady jobs and with few personal possessions. They belonged to the underclass of a supposedly classless socialist society. And yet their apparent willingness to risk their freedom in order to stand up for their beliefs called to mind Vladimir Shelkov, the highly influential advocate of human rights in the Soviet Union after Stalin’s death and the leader of Reformist Adventists. Shelkov commanded the respect of Soviet dissidents and human rights activists such as Andrei Sakharov.² Perhaps here, in the case file of these unknown fourteen men and women lay the answer to my question. I decided to pursue it.

¹He who rules determines the religion of the ruled (The Peace of Augsburg, 1555).

²See Andrei Sakharov, *Memoirs* (New York, 1990), 493.



Figure 0.1: Kiev and Bila Tserkva

After much enquiry, I finally traced the file to the archive of the SBU (Sluzhba bezpeky Ukrayiny, the Security Service of Ukraine), the successor to the KGB of the Soviet era, in Kiev, where I was granted access. The case file consists of two volumes with 852 leaves (folios) of all sizes, both sides of which were used in most cases. As is true of other similar files, this file, with few exceptions, is written almost entirely in longhand, and is tightly bound (which makes it difficult to read the bound edge of some pages). Many pages contain notations (mainly underlinings) marked by readers



Figure 0.2: The cover of the case file (volume one)

(most likely judges and prosecutors). Here and there, handwritten phrases and words turn out to be almost indecipherable. In the end, it required three summers to read every word of the file and complete the research.

The two-volume case file constitutes a unique set of nearly complete trial records from preliminary investigations to trial proceedings, to sentencing, to appeals, and ultimately to the exoneration of the accused. Such complete records are a rare find, in spite of the fact that similar political trials took place all over the country.³ Moreover, as I came to realize, the records of the case afford rare and invaluable insights into the minds of those swept up in Stalin's terror machine and into the workings of the Soviet system of justice in the last year of Stalin's rule.

Through a close analysis of the case file (*Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhby bezpeky Ukrayiny, spr. 58859fp*), this book addresses the original question I sought to answer: what was going on in the minds of the people. In this sense, the present book follows the example set by Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (first published in Italian in 1976), which analyses the court records of a trial of a heretic in order to understand the mental world ("cosmos") of a man in sixteenth century Italy. The people I examine here were almost certainly *not* representative of 'ordinary' Soviet citizens under Stalin. So little is known, and often so much is simply unknowable, about the minds of 'ordinary' Soviet citizens ('the silent majority') under Stalin that unless one knows much more, it is difficult to speak of 'representativeness.' In this regard, even the admittedly unrepresentative cases like the Adventists examined here afford valuable insight. At the same time, the book uncovers the mechanism of political repression, intrigue, and provocation by the secret police and the roles played by prosecutors, defence lawyers, and judges in Stalin's last days. Together, these two elements reveal the complex relations between an atheist regime and a group of religious believers under Stalin.

In the twentieth century, Arthur Koestler explored the mind of a revolutionary in his 1940 novel *Darkness at Noon*. According to Koestler, the revolutionary (modelled on the Old Bolshevik Nikolai Bukharin, who was tried at the famous Moscow show trial in 1938 and executed) incriminated himself in crimes he had not committed as a last service to the revolution. By contrast, the Adventists examined here appear unaffected

³One exception is Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov, eds, *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee* (New Haven, CT, 2001). Yet even this volume is far from complete, lacking many relevant documents such as interrogation records.

by the revolution carried out by the atheist Marxists. This case reveals instead the persistence of a moral universe deeply private and separate from the official, atheist and revolutionary regime.

The 1952 trial of the fourteen Adventists was unknown to the world. The Soviet government arrested and accused them of belonging to an illegal sect and of spreading illegal faith. They confessed to their crimes, were tried *in camera*, declared guilty, and despatched to the Gulag. In fact, however, it was not proved that such a clandestine organization existed. Nor was it proved that the accused refused to perform military duties or that they had even the slightest missionary interest.

A careful reading of the case files suggests that the accused were inclined to pacifism, yes, but were not intransigent opponents of military service. They appeared to have negotiated a middle ground between their faith and the Soviet, atheist regime. Their attitude towards the Soviet government was ambivalent and ambiguous. In general, the case file suggests that they kept their faith to themselves under conditions of relentless attack, quietly observing the Saturday Sabbath in contradiction to the Soviet practice of a six-day work week, Saturdays included.⁴ To use Albert O. Hirschman's categories of 'loyalty,' 'voice,' and 'exit,'⁵ the fourteen Adventists clearly sought 'exit.' Unable to physically exit the Soviet regime, they sought an ontological exit in their private religious universe. Even there they were forced to find a middle ground with the atheist regime. All the same, the Soviet police could not tolerate private lives of faith and planted provocateurs among the accused. The chief defendant, the alleged leader of the 'sect' who refused to speak throughout pretrial investigation and the trial itself, appears to have been an agent provocateur.

In 1952, those accused of crimes against the state were tried in court, unlike the time of Stalin's Great Terror (1937–8), when no evidence was needed to convict and execute people extrajudicially. Even so, actual evidence did not matter very much; *prima-facie* evidence sufficed. Readers eager to find brave and heroic resistance fighters in cases of alleged crimes against the state can be easily duped by such evidence. Such was exactly what the police and the Soviet government wanted. They were past mas-

⁴The beliefs of Adventists are described in more detail in Chapter 2.

⁵Albert H. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA, 1970).

ters of deception. Unwary readers are likely to find themselves in the trap set by the police.⁶

The present book is a critical study of Stalinist trial records, and serves at the same time as a warning against a facile reading. After a discussion of the arrests of the fourteen defendants in late 1952 against the background of the Soviet religious policy of the time, the book analyses in turn the records of pre-trial interrogations and testimonies, the trial itself, and post-trial appeals and eventual exonerations. This book thereby seeks to elucidate both the private lives of Soviet citizens and the everyday working of Stalinist political repression into which they were sucked. Although religious practise is an excellent example of private life under the atheist regime of Stalin, oddly this important subject is often left out in the study of the ‘private sphere’.⁷ The present book addresses this lacuna.

The accused Adventists lived quiet, private lives of faith on the margins of society, not lives of defiance but, rather, ones of silent nonconformity. They certainly did not think of their lives as heroic. They lived as far away from the official world as imaginable. The private universe of the Adventists did not constitute a direct political challenge to the official Soviet universe. Its existence did mean, however, that the official, Stalinist universe had failed to conquer the hearts and minds of Soviet individuals, young and old, and this proved a threat to the socialist harmony of the regime. The state was compelled to remove this threat and purify the Soviet regime of non-Sovietized human elements.⁸ Although the Adventists committed no crime, the atheist state insisted that they were political criminals. Such was the logic of Stalinist political repression.

Religious subcultures were no stranger to Ukraine and Russia. In spite of persecution and discrimination, the Old Believers (splinters from

⁶See the discussion of this trap in the late-Stalin period: Hiroaki Kuromiya, ‘“Political Youth Opposition in Late Stalinism”: Evidence and Conjecture,’ *Europe-Asia Studies* 55:4 (June 2003), 631–8.

⁷See, for example, Lewis H. Siegelbaum, ed., *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia* (New York, 2006). Note, however, Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practises* (Berkeley, CA, 1999), which does not focus on religion but explores the private in Soviet history in depth.

⁸On this point, see See Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 2001) and Weiner, ed., *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford, CA, 2003).

the official Orthodox Church), Roman and Greek Catholics, Protestants, and many other sects thrived underground in Imperial Russia.⁹ In 1917 Orthodoxy was replaced by a secular faith, Marxism. Yet even Stalin's savage terror failed to eradicate religious subcultures.

If at least some people were able to sustain quiet private lives of non-conformity, albeit in a rather remote part of Ukraine, how many others lived similar lives in the Soviet Union as a whole in the last days of Stalin? No doubt many, but even the Soviet secret police could not have known the extent because few people showed their true colours under Stalin. The police did not always trust even private diaries, suspecting them of being a means of dissimulation and self-protection.¹⁰ For this very reason the secret police used every means available to extract the hidden, private thoughts of the Soviet people. Surveillance was ubiquitous, police agents, informants, provocateurs were afoot everywhere, and, once in custody, people were routinely tortured in an attempt to pry into the hidden, private realms of their minds. Obviously it is patently wrong to assert either that every Soviet citizen was opposed to Stalin's regime or, contrarily, that everyone was wholeheartedly in support of it.¹¹ Clearly, people could not openly challenge the regime, and the vast majority outwardly supported it.

What this case shows is that there were people under Stalin who lived a life of nonconformity without openly or outrightly rejecting Stalin's Soviet Union. Their numbers were likely not small. Some groups of Evangelicals (Baptists, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists, and others), Catholics, Old Believers, and even Orthodox Christians lived similar lives.¹² The present book is merely a first step towards the study of such

⁹For the Old Believers, see Irina Paert, *Old Believers: Religious Dissent and Gender in Russia, 1760–1850* (Manchester/New York, 2003) and Leonid Heretz, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity: Popular Religion and Traditional Culture under the Last Tsars* (Cambridge, 2008), chap. 2. For others, see Chapter 2.

¹⁰This complex issue has yet to be examined carefully. For the assessment of Stalin-era diaries, see the contrasting views by Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA, 2006) and Nina Lugovskaia, *Khochu zhit': iz dnevnika shkol'nitcy 1932–1937* (Moscow, 2003).

¹¹See the discussion of the division of historians into these two extreme views: Hiroaki Kuromiya, 'How Do We Know What the Soviet People Thought under Stalin?' in Timo Vihavainen, ed., *Sovetskaia vlast' – narodnaia vlast'*? (St. Petersburg, 2003).

¹²Aleksei Beglov has uncovered the underground life of Orthodox believers under Stalin: *V poiskakh 'bezgreshnykh katakomb': Tserkovnoe podpol'e v SSSR* (Moscow, 2008).

people under Stalin. It was these individuals who sustained nonconformist beliefs throughout the brutal years of Stalin's reign. Intimidation and fear were ubiquitous. Yet some people did not lose their private or professional conscience even under Stalin's regime. In the present case there is even one defence lawyer who appears to have fought for his clients to the extent he could under the circumstances. Without such individuals, the dissident and human rights movement of the post-Stalin era could not have gained the momentum that it did.

In the case of the Adventists in Bila Tserkva, as in numerous other cases, police provocateurs sought to paint a picture of an anti-Soviet militant sect from peaceful and private believers and nonconformists. Soviet authorities formulated the trial as a stark confrontation between two incompatible moral codes: Soviet law versus divine law. As it turns out, the criminal case was a police fabrication. At the very least, the file reveals no credible evidence of the alleged political crimes – crimes against the state: the outright refusal of military service, anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, and the organization of an illegal, anti-Soviet group. The police amassed *prima facie* evidence of the crimes in the form of self-incriminating confessions. These were extracted with threat and torture, both widely used in Soviet criminal justice.

In this as in other cases the police withheld vital information (such as the use of agents provocateurs) and blatantly falsified testimonies. The mechanism of falsification was so elaborate that in the end the police and the prosecution appear to have lost track of their own contraption. For instance, in the pre-trial investigations, according to the case file, all of the accused (save one who refused to speak at all) pleaded guilty. Yet at the trial, they all initially recanted their pre-trial guilty pleas and pleaded *not guilty*. Then, during the trial, some of them recanted their recantations and pleaded guilty. Three years after they were sentenced, the procuracy in Kiev claimed that all the defendants had pleaded *not guilty* in the pre-trial investigations!

A perusal of the file thus reveals layer upon layer of contradictions and inconsistencies that are carefully hidden between the lines. What appear as casual remarks or slips of the tongue inevitably find their way into the file. Fiction and fabrication, when applied to real life, inevitably create such contradictions and inconsistencies. By analysing such inconsistencies, one can remove the lies layer by layer and access the kernel of truth.

Fortunately, unlike in 1937–8, the defendants were not executed immediately after the sentencing. They were despatched to the Gulag and granted the right to challenge the convictions. After the trial, half of the defendants appealed to the Supreme Court. In the end, after Stalin's death, most of the condemned were quietly exonerated. All of the fourteen accused were formally declared innocent of the accusations in 1989, at the time of glasnost' and perestroika. No crime existed to begin with.

The present study of a small group of Adventists thus affords a microcosmic view of Soviet society in which the state used every method available to invade the private sphere of its citizens and in which private citizens nevertheless found ways to maintain their own private lives. In this sense, this case is far from peculiar: it is symptomatic of the relations between the Soviet regime and Soviet society, relations fraught with terror.

The trial took place within the tense international context of the Cold War. When the new American ambassador George F. Kennan returned to Moscow in the spring of 1952 after six years, he was alarmed by the poisonous atmosphere. As an American weekly reported at the time, ‘The hate-America campaign is on a vaster scale than the phony “peace” drive. It blankets the press and saturates the air. More significantly, the Russians are determined enough about it to cut into industrial and farm production, gathering Soviet workers into frequent mass meetings to hear denunciations of America.’ Kennan, however, noted a difference from the earlier Soviet propaganda. The US people, whom the Soviet press had once described as peace-loving friends misled by politicians, military leaders, and the ‘Wall Street imperialists,’ were now depicted as ‘beasts and cannibals.’¹³ The Cold War was in full swing. Although the Soviet Union did not take a direct part in the Korean War, Stalin secretly supported North Korea and China against South Korea, the United States, and other United Nations forces. Stalin promoted the Soviet Union as an advocate of international peace while depicting the United States and other capitalist countries as ‘war mongers.’ The Soviet official rhetoric against the United States was shrill.

Everything ‘capitalist’ and especially everything American had become tantamount to ‘anti-Soviet.’ Whereas before the Second World War people

¹³ ‘Report from Moscow,’ *Time*, 30 June 1952, 25.

were arrested as German, Polish, or Japanese spies, after the war they were arrested on charges of espionage for the United States or Great Britain. The Gulag was filled with ‘American spies.’ Baptists were called ‘agents of American imperialism.’¹⁴ ‘Those who spoke English well or associated in one way or another with Americans were arrested.’¹⁵ Anti-Semitism raised its ugly head: Stalin asserted that Soviet Jews were ‘rootless cosmopolitans’ without loyalty to the country and therefore potential spies for capitalist countries. Similar suspicions fell on other ethnic and religious minorities. Unlike Orthodox Christians, Protestants (including Adventists) and Catholics were deemed politically disloyal by default because of their suspected foreign connections.

Considerable fear obtained within and outside the Soviet Union, generating suspicion that the aging dictator Stalin had something sinister up his sleeve, possibly another Great Terror. In the end, Stalin died suddenly, in March 1953, and the fear subsided. No one knew what to expect, however, in the autumn of 1952. It was during this tense political period, in an atmosphere of fear and suspicion, that the fourteen followers of Adventism, by origin an American religion, were arrested, tried, and sent to the Gulag. Charges of espionage for the United States would have been impossible to uphold, for they had lived private lives of destitution on the margins of Soviet society in the provincial Ukrainian city of Bila Tserkva and in the surrounding countryside. Nothing whatsoever connected them to the United States but their faith. Their alleged crime was to declare allegiance to divine law above the Soviet laws, more specifically to promote the spread of pacifist propaganda by refusing to bear arms or serve in the Soviet Army, a serious political crime against the state. While Stalin spoke publicly on the international stage in favour of peace, privately within the borders of the Soviet Union, pacifists were under attack.

Most striking about the trial of the fourteen Adventists is the compulsive energy, manpower, and time dedicated to the pursuit and prosecution of the fourteen defendants – vulnerable people, none of whom could have been considered a threat by the farthest stretch of the imagination.

¹⁴P.M. Bondarchuk, *Religiinist' naselennia Ukrayny u 40–80-kh rokakh XX st.: sotsiokul'turni vplyvy, osoblyvosti, tendentsii zmin* (Kiev: Instytut istorii Ukrayny NAN Ukrayny, 2009), 31.

¹⁵Note an acute observation by a former Japanese intelligence expert who was in the Gulag at the time: Hikosaburō Hata, *Kunan ni taete* (Tokyo, 1958), 185.

An examination of the case file reveals a pattern of abuse by the police calculated to obtain the confessions they sought. During the Great Terror of 1937–8, with the threat of war on the horizon, Stalin justified his persecution of ‘enemies of the people.’ Stalin remained firmly convinced until the very end of his life that the Great Terror was justified. He never dismantled his terror machine. In 1952, as this trial shows, a bewildering and pointless system was still in place. Such was the Soviet society of 1952.

While the political setting of Stalin’s Soviet Union is Orwellian, the plot of the story is Kafkaesque. What Stalin’s secret police did to bring the fourteen believers to trial was extraordinarily complex and even bizarre. This case, like Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (published posthumously in German in 1925), was nightmarish for the accused. And, like Kafka’s novel, this story too is absurd and horrific, but occasionally also farcical.

Chapter 1 opens with the arrests of the fourteen defendants. This is followed, in chapter 2, by a discussion of the religious policy of the Soviet Union under Stalin, the beliefs of Adventists and Reformed Adventists, and the place of Bila Tserkva in Soviet Ukraine. Chapters 3 through 7 examine the trial records (interrogations, testimonies, the trial itself, and the post-trial appeals and their outcome) in depth. (The three chapters on interrogations and testimonies [3 – 5] are detailed and complex, because they deal separately with fourteen individual defendants. Some readers might wish to follow only a few individuals. To facilitate the reading, those defendants who subsequently appealed to contest the verdict of the court as well as their own ‘confessions’ are marked with a ‘black diamond’ sign [❖] in the section heads of these three chapters.) Finally, the conclusion briefly describes the post-Stalin development of state and religion in the Soviet Union.

All references to the present case file (spr. 58859fp) are made in the main text using parentheses: for example, (1:199) and (2:100v), which mean volume 1, folio 199 and volume 2, folio 100 verso respectively. For the transliteration of Cyrillic letters the Library of Congress system is used throughout.

Proper names always pose problems. The case file is written largely in Russian, with some documents in Ukrainian. All personal names are

given in their Russian renditions in the file. This reflects the fact that official (Russian) identities were imposed upon individuals in this part of Ukraine. Whose names to render in Ukrainian is not easy to determine: an individual's ethnicity is often difficult to identify and what language each person normally spoke is impossible to know. Therefore I have resigned myself to using Russian names here. For the fourteen defendants discussed, all of whom were ethnic Ukrainians, I have added their Ukrainian names in their first appearances. Most geographical names are given in their present local forms. Some names, however, are used in their familiar English form, such as Kiev and Moscow.

I Arrests

In this city, and I have noted them,
A subversive faction, enemies of the State,
A cell of oppositionists, call them what you will,
who reject the law, and my leadership!

King Creon¹

ON THE NIGHT of 17 to 18 November 1952 more than a dozen people, seven men and six women, were arrested in and near the city of Bila Tserkva on charges that they belonged to the illegal religious sect of ‘Reformed Adventists.’ They were held in Prison no. 4 in the city. All were ethnic Ukrainians and did not belong to the Communist Party. The youngest was 24 years of age and the oldest 68. All had been born into peasant families. They were neither revolutionaries nor ‘workers,’ the heroes of Soviet society. They were all poor. While some of them worked on collective farms, many chose not to work as farmers or wage earners for religious reasons: they observed the Sabbath on Saturday, at that time an official workday. Their faith and their life contradicted the Soviet system. So, at least, judged Soviet authorities. By no stretch of the imagination, however, could they have posed any political threat to the regime. Nevertheless they were deemed politically dangerous.

Their arrests were ordered by the local secret police (MGB) officer Subbotin (the warrant was often co-signed by another officer, Moskalev, and in one case by an officer named Khor’kov) and approved by the prosecutor of the Kiev Oblast’ (province) Malyi and the Kiev MGB officer Martynenko.

The arrested were (in the order in which these people appear in their case file):

- (1) Polina Petrovna **Gavriliuk** (Polina Petrivna Havryliuk), 31, born in 1921 into a poor peasant household in the village of Lemeshchivka, Zhashkiv District, Kiev Oblast’. She had five

¹Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Don Taylor (London, 2006), 15.



Figure 1.1: Polina Gavriliuk

years of schooling. Unmarried, she made a living by seasonal labour (collecting seeds) for the farm ‘Agrolespitomnik.’ At the time of her arrest, she lived at 92 Railway Settlement Line Four in the city of Bila Tserkva (1:21–2, 2:304). Gavriliuk was an orphan: her father Petr, mother Galina, and brother Andrei all died in 1933 (at the time of the Great Famine in Ukraine, although the famine is not mentioned in the case file). She lived in Germany (almost certainly as a forced labourer) from 1942 to 1943. The police conducted a search of her residence and seized four notebooks containing excerpts from ‘reactionary religious books’ such as *Genuine Truth*, *The Battle and Its Reason* (*Bor'ba i ee prichina*), and such. No other belongings save her (internal) passport were found, and therefore no inventory was made (1:25–7).²

²This is somewhat unusual. Even at the time of the Great Terror, such inventories were normally made carefully. It is possible that Gavriliuk and most other defendants hid or gave away their personal possessions in anticipation of arrest. It is more likely, however,

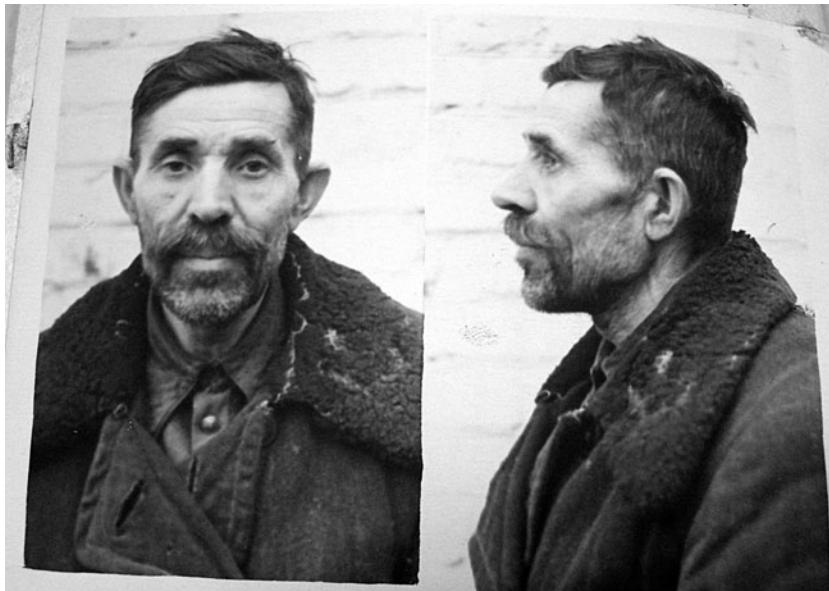


Figure 1.2: Petr Pilipenko

(2) Petr Ivanovich **Pilipenko** (Petro Ivanovich Pylypenko), 54, born in 1898 into a poor peasant household in the village of Potiivka near the city of Bila Tserkva. A long-time Adventist and barely literate, he had no steady occupation. At the time of his arrest, he lived at 86 Krupskaia Street, the city of Bila Tserkva (1:65–6, 2:304). With Pilipenko lived his wife Mariia Maksimovna, and sons, Petr, Pavel, and Vasilii. (Later it turned out that he had three more children.) Pilipenko fought in the war from June to October 1941, when he was taken prisoner and lived in a camp in Germany. Liberated by the Red Army in 1945, he served in the medical-sanitary battalion of the Red Army. The police searched his house on 18 November and found one notebook with two excerpts from religious literature. The family owned nothing else. No inventory of Pilipenko's belongings was made (1:69–72).

(3) Praskov'ia Ivanovna **Glivaskaia** (Praskov'ia Ivanivna Hlyvas'-ka), 42, born in 1910 into a poor peasant household in the village

that they indeed lived with very few possessions.

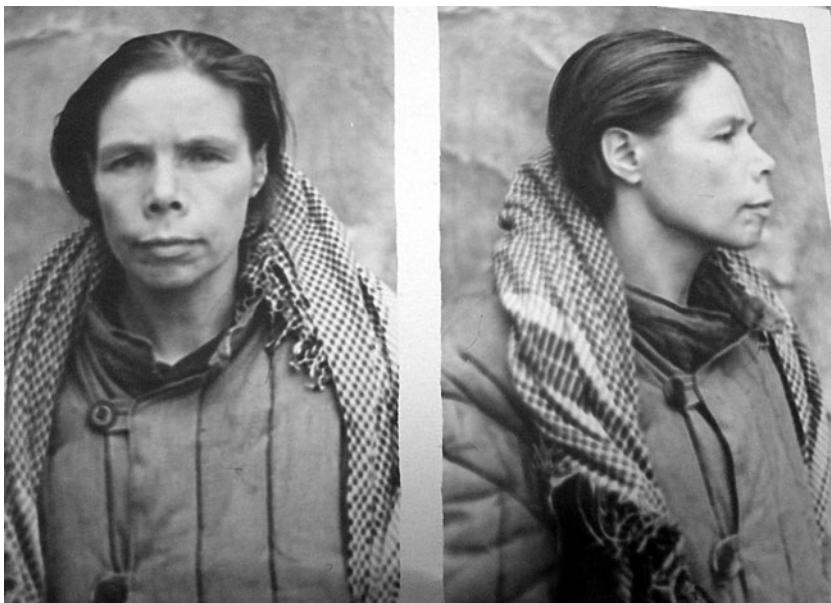


Figure 1.3: Praskov'ia Glivaskaia

of Matiushshi, Bila Tserkva District. Unmarried and poorly educated, she was a long-time Adventist and made a living by seasonal labour (collecting seeds). At the time of her arrest, she lived at 92 Railway Settlement Line Four in the city of Bila Tserkva (1:127–8, 2:304). She had a brother, Iakov Ivanovich Glivaskii, 43, who did not have an occupation, and sisters Sofia Ivanovna Saenko, 60, who worked on a collective farm, and Sekletina, who was arrested along with her. As a resident in the city, she possessed a passport. In searching her residence, the police found one notebook with excerpts from ‘reactionary religious books’ such as *Signs of the Times* and another with copies from *Biblical Conversations* and *The Acts of the Apostles*. Unlike most others arrested, she owned property, a ‘halfhouse,’ a small unit of a room and a kitchen attached to her neighbour’s house and roofed by tarred paper where she lived with her sister Sekletina. Her father died in 1914 (probably in the First World War) and her mother in 1933 (almost certainly in the Great Famine). There were disputes over exactly how her surname was to be spelled, Glavatskaia or



Figure 1.4: Sekletina Glivaskaia

Glivaskaia. She insisted that her real name was Glivaskaia, as written in her passport. Nevertheless, she signed her name as Gli-vatska (1:93–6, 100–1). At other times, however, she also signed her name as ‘Glivaka’ (without the ‘s’) and ‘Glivka,’ revealing her limited level of literacy.

(4) Sekletina Ivanovna **Glivaskaia** (Sekleta Ivanivna Hlyvas’ka, Praskov’ia’s older sister), 51, born in 1901. She often pronounced her surname as ‘Govatska,’ perhaps somewhat in Polish fashion (‘Główacka’). Unmarried and illiterate, she lived with her sister in the city of Bila Tserkva and, like her, worked as a seasonal labourer (1:93–4, 2:304). According to Sekletina, she had two more sisters Marta (Marfa?) Ivanovna Pen’kovskaia and Akilina Ivanovna Bogatyrenko. The police searched her residence and impounded one item: excerpts from the Russian edition of a religious book by Ellen G. White (1827–1915), one of the founders of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the United States, *Remnant Church Not Babylon*. Apart from that, there were no belongings, and no inventory was made (1:131v–3).

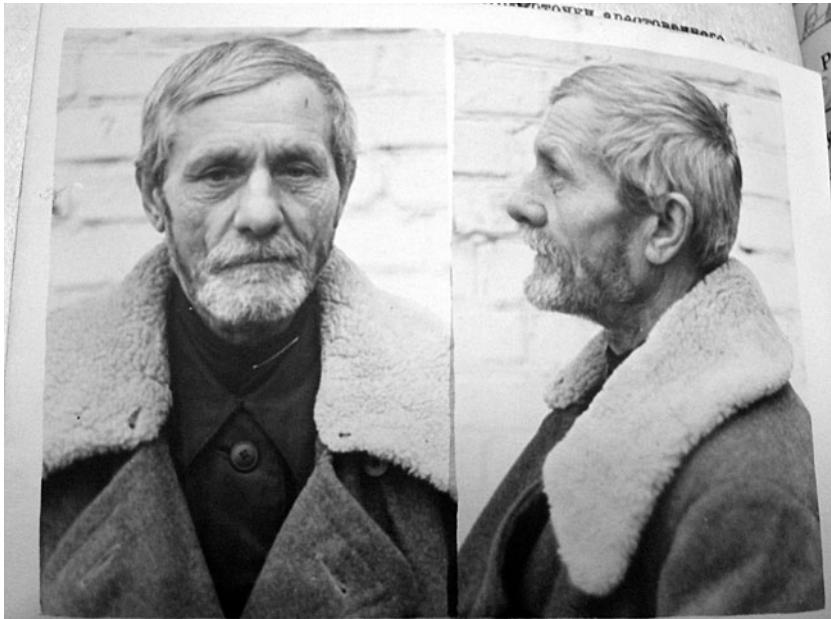


Figure 1.5: Sergei Borzak

(5) Sergei Arkhipovich **Borzak** (Serhii Arkhypovych Borzak), 64, born in 1888 into a poor peasant family in the village of Popravka, Bila Tserkva District. He had only two years of schooling. Also a long-time Adventist, he worked on a beekeeping collective farm. At the time of his arrest, he lived in the village of Popravka (1:154–5). His wife, Efrosiniia Iakovlena, 52, was a housewife. His daughter Polina, 38 (*sic* – her mother would have been 14 or 15 at her birth) lived in the village of Ozirno, Bila Tserkva District, his son Pavel, 34, worked in Moscow as a secretary in the Military Tribunal of the Ministry of Navy, and another son, Iakov, 26, lived in the city of Dymer, Kiev Oblast'. His grandson Yuri, 16, lived in the city of Kiev. Brozak had a sister, Mariia Kabula, who lived in the same village of Popravka. Borzak, like others arrested, had few personal possessions. The police impounded only three items: a book by Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, a collection of the journal *The Voice of Truth*, and another book, *The Psalms of Zion*. No inventory of his belongings was made (1:158–9, 162–3).



Figure 1.6: Ksenia Belik

(6) Kseniia Denisovna **Belik** (Ksenia Denysivna Bilyk), 53, born in 1899 into a peasant family in the village of Tubil'tsy, Cherkasy District, Kiev Oblast'. She possessed only limited literacy. A widow, she did not work and seemed to have lived with her son Gavriil (who was arrested along with her) in the city of Bila Tserkva (1:193–4, 2:305). In addition to Gavriil, she had two sons, Iakov, 34, and Aleksandr, 17, and a daughter Mariia, 27, all living in the city of Bila Tserkva. She had no belongings except for six notebooks. No inventory was therefore made (1:198–201).

(7) Fedora Feodos'evna **Il'chenko** (Fedora Feodosivna Il'chenko), 57, born in 1895 into a poor peasant family in the village of Popravka, Bila Tserkva District. She was illiterate (although she claimed that she could 'only read the Bible'). Also a long-time Adventist, she was married to Logvin Safronovich Il'chenko, 62, and was said to have worked nowhere. At the time of arrest, she was living in the village of Popravka (1:224–5, 2:305). Her son Andrei, 22, served in the Red Army in the city of Leningrad,



Figure 1.7: Fedora Il'chenko

while her daughter Liudmila, 18, like her father, worked on a collective farm. The police search of her residence yielded nothing: she possessed no personal belongings to speak of. No inventory was made in view of this fact (1:231–2, 234).

(8) Vasilii Arkhipovich **Brovchenko** (Vasil' Arkhypovych Brovchenko), 24, born in 1928 into a poor peasant household in the village of Trushky, Bila Tserkva District. He had six years of education. Married to Anna Nesterovna Brovchenko, 30, at the time of his arrest, he lived at 68 Ostrovskii Street in the city of Bila Tserkva and worked as a tailor (2:248–9, 2:305). Before he moved to the city with his parents in late 1950, he had worked on a collective farm in Trushky. He had an infant daughter Nadezhda, born in 1952, a brother, Filipp, 22, a worker, and a sister, Oksana, 25, a student. In searching his residence, the police found nothing that needed to be inventoried except for his internal passport and a certificate of release from military duties (1:255–6).

(9) Liubov' Prokof'evna **Fedorchuk** (Liubov Prokopivna Fedorchuk), 41, born in 1911 into a peasant family in the village of Shcheniiv, Cherniakhiv District, Zhytomyr Oblast'. Unmarried,

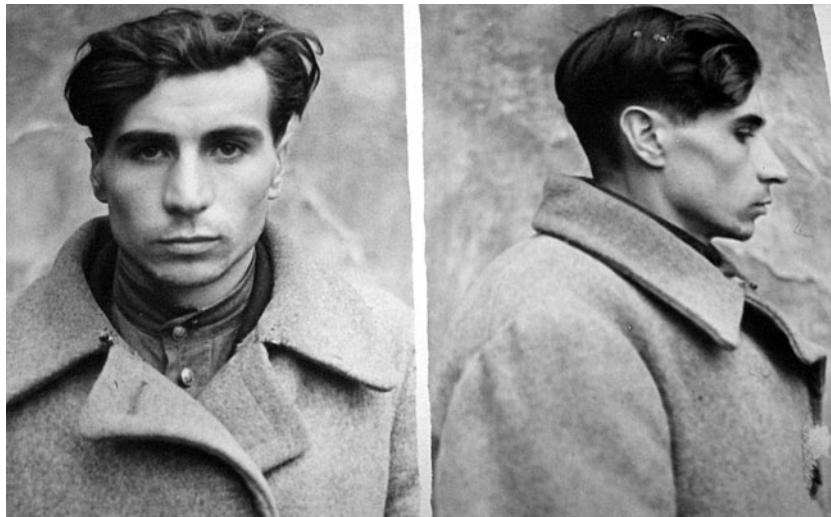


Figure 1.8: Vasilii Brovchenko



Figure 1.9: Liubov' Fedorchuk

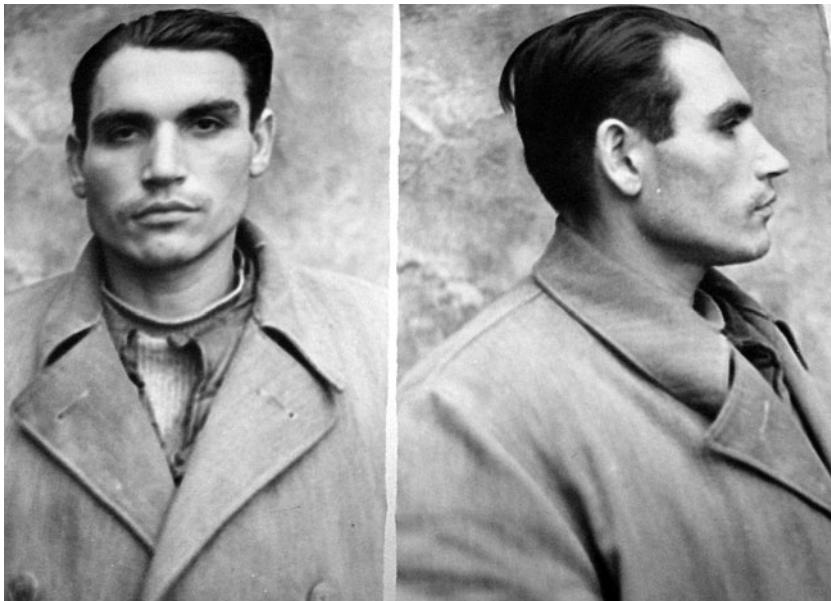


Figure 1.10: Gavriil Belik

she made a living by seasonal labour (collecting wood seeds) for the farm 'Agrolespitomnik.' At the time of her arrest, she lived at 23 Vodopiina Street in the city of Bila Tserkva (1:282, 2:305). She had a son, Aleksandr, 16, a brother Ivan, 40, living in Ivanovo, Russia, and two sisters, Olena Peredera, 39, in Kiev, and Ekaterina Chumachenko, 36, in Bila Tserkva. The police impounded her passport, a short book of indexes to the Old and New Testaments, a brochure and nine notebooks on various religious themes. Fedorchuk possessed nothing else and no inventory was made (1:286–9).

(10) Gavriil Nikitovich **Belik** (Havrylo Mykytovych Bilyk, Ksenia Belik's son), 32, born in 1920 into a peasant family in the village of Tubil'tsy, Cherkasy District. Married to Anna Artemovna Belik, 25, he worked as a painter on a construction-repair crew in the city of Bila Tserkva, where he also lived (at 25 Budennyi Street) (2:1–2, 305). He had a son, Vladimir, 4. The police seized his internal passport and a military service card. Nothing else was found, with no inventory made (2:5–7).

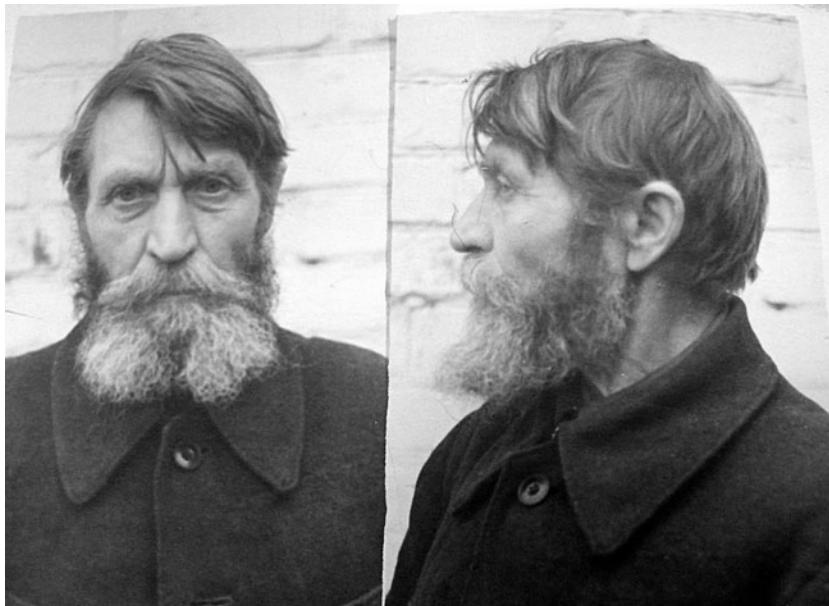


Figure 1.11: Dem'ian Darovskii

(11) Dem'ian Grigor'evich **Darovskii** (Dem'ian Hryhorovych Darovs'kyi), 65, born in 1887 into a poor peasant household in the village of Kozhenyky, Bila Tserkva District. He had only a limited level of schooling. At the time of his arrest, he had no steady occupation and lived at 25 Stavyshchans'ka Street in the city of Bila Tserkva (1:35–6, 2:305–6). He was married to Matrena Fedotovna, 74, and had a son, Grigorii, 40, and a daughter, Eva Prisiazhniuk, 43, a housewife who lived in the same house as her parents. The police searched his house on 18 November and impounded his internal passport and a copy of his birth certificate. The search found nothing else and consequently no inventory was made (2:39–42).

(12) Arkhip Pavlovich **Brovchenko** (Arkhyp Pavlovych Brovchenko, Vasiliy Brovchenko's father), 53, born in 1899 into a poor peasant household in the village of Trushky, Bila Tserkva District. He had only two years of schooling. Also an Adventist of long standing, he had, at the time of his arrest, no steady occupation and lived at 68 Railway Settlement Line Four in the

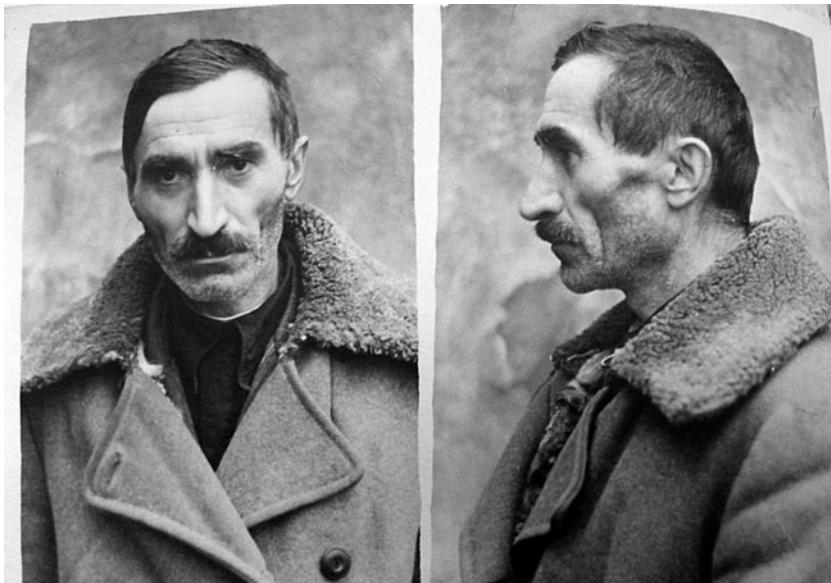


Figure 1.12: Arkhip Browchenko

city of Bila Tserkva (2:73–4, 306). He was married to Nadezhda Luk’ianovna, 48, and had three children, Vasilii (arrested along with him), 24, Filipp, 22, and Oksana, 15. Like many others arrested, Browchenko was poor and had few belongings. The police seized his passport, a certificate of exemption from military duties, his birth certificate, a Bible, *The Psalms of Zion*, two letters written by him (and apparently not mailed), and a six-page manuscript. He possessed nothing else and no inventory was made (2:77–80).

(13) Ivan Terent’evich **Babenko** (Ivan Terentiovych Babenko), 68, the oldest among the arrested, was born in 1884 into a poor peasant household in the village of Popravka, Bila Tserkva District. Also a long-time Adventist, he was a widower and only moderately literate (that is, he could read and write with difficulty): indeed, his signatures in the present case file suggest that he could barely sign his own name. At the time of his arrest he lived in Popravka (2:103–4, 306). His wife died in 1947 (possibly in the post-war famine) and his son Ignat, 44, worked on the col-

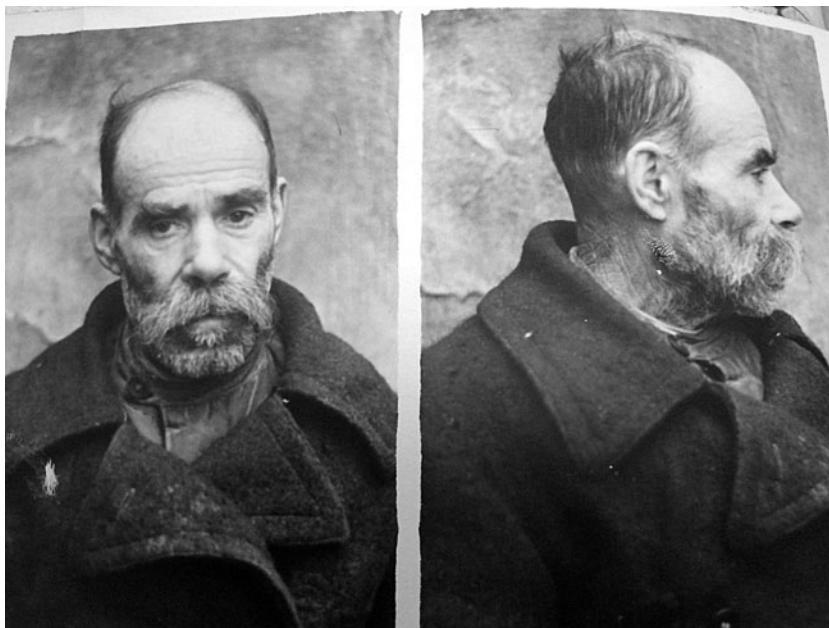


Figure 1.13: Ivan Babenko

lective farm where he also worked. On 18 November the police searched his house and seized Ellen G. White's *Testimonies for the Church*, a typewritten Russian version of the American original, and *The Psalms of Zion*. The police signed the search document with a note: 'In the search [of Babenko's residence] no property has been found. In view of this no inventory of property has been made' (2:107–10).

The arrest warrants against these individuals list the names of witnesses to their alleged crimes (save for Borzak's case, which lists none). Some witnesses were subsequently summoned to the court, but others never reappear in the case file. Some appear to have been family members or relations of the arrested (judging by their surnames). About half of the arrested appear as witnesses against other arrested individuals. Of them, Gavriliiuk and Fedorchuk appear most often (eight and seven times respectively), suggesting that these two women were broken by the police and used against the others. Before they were formally arrested, these

thirteen individuals were detained or at least questioned by the secret police. Belik was already under arrest on 17 November when a witness against him was being deposed, and Babenko subsequently testified that he was arrested on 16 November (2:169–70, 378).

In other words, the thirteen, at least some of them, were arrested first and then issued their arrest warrants. This was a standard practice throughout the Stalin period. In all cases but Borzak's the arrest warrants state that they confessed to their crimes.

Ten of the thirteen had no 'criminal records,' whereas three had earlier been convicted. Borzak's 'crime' was traced to the pre-revolutionary tsarist era. In March 1914, he was convicted as a 'conscientious objector' and sent for four years of hard labour, which he served in Orlov, Russia. He was released in 1917 thanks to the February 1917 revolution that overturned the tsarist government. He was twice arrested after the revolution, in 1934 for refusing to fulfil his military duties because of his religious convictions and in 1940 for 'hooliganism.' Borzak was sentenced to five months but was subsequently exonerated (1:158–9). Gavriil Belik was arrested in September 1940 when he was 20 years of age while living in the city of Kiev at 43/68 Babyn Iar Street. His crime was 'anti-Soviet sectarian activity' and he was sentenced by the NKVD special board to five years of correctional labour. He served the sentence in Tomsk, West Siberia (2:5a, 524). Likewise, Darovskii was arrested in 1934 and sentenced by the people's court (the court of first instance at the time) to three years for 'anti-Soviet agitation.' In 1937 he was again arrested and sentenced by the secret police (then called NKVD) *troika* (that is, without a trial) to ten years in the Gulag for 'terrorist intentions' (elsewhere it is said that he was sentenced by the NKVD special board for 'anti-Soviet agitation').³ He served the sentences. (Moreover, his son Grigorii, too, had been arrested and sentenced to 25 years in the Gulag and was said to have served the sentence. The details of Grigorii's case are not known, however) (2:39–40, 46, 293, 524). In addition, Ksenia Belik's husband (and Gavriil Belik's father) Nikita was arrested in 1940, a month before Gavriil was arrested, and sentenced to ten years for 'anti-Soviet agitation.' He died in 1942, in prison (1:198–9, 2:213, 305).

³ At the time of the Great Terror, nearly one million people were tried and executed by special secret police panels called *troika* (three-person tribunal), *dvoika* (two-person tribunal), or special board without a trial.

The most important arrest for the Soviet secret police came after these arrests. A Ukrainian, alleged by the police to be the ringleader of the illegal sect who had recruited a number of followers, was arrested nine days later on 26 November in the city of Bila Tserkva:

(14) Vasilii Fedorovich **Belokon'** (Vasyl' Fedorovych Bilokin'), 57, was born in 1895 into a peasant family in the village of Mohylivka, Zhmerynka District, Vinnytsia Oblast', Ukraine. A long-time Adventist, he had only a limited level of primary education and no occupation. He lived in Mohylivka with his wife Aleksandra Fillipovna, 52, and his son, Sergei, 30. There were three more children: Ol'ga, 32, Ivan, 28, and Mikhail, 25. During the period of German occupation he was alleged to have led the organization of Reformed Adventists in Zhmerynka District (1:4, 8–9, 2:303).

In Belokon's case, the decision by two MGB officers, Subbotin and Vetoshkin, to arrest him, supported by their colleagues Khor'kov and Moskalev, was approved by the head of investigation, Zashchitin. The police decision was then sanctioned by their boss, Logvinenko, and the prosecutor Malyi (1:2–3). No 'mug shot' was taken of Belokon' in spite of his alleged role as ringleader in this case.

Like most others arrested earlier, Belokon' had no property. On 28 November Subbotin and Vetoshkin searched his residence. They seized four books: *The Old Testament*, *The New Testament*, *Biblical Conversations*, and *Biblical Lessons*. Nothing else was found. He did not even possess a passport. (This meant Belokon' had no right to live in any city legally.) Therefore, they reported to their superior that they had no inventory of property in Belokon's case (1:10–11).

Oddly, Belokon's address in Bila Tserkva is not noted. According to the case file, he lived in his native village in Vinnytsia 'until the day of his arrest' (2:303). If Vetoshkin and Subbotin in fact made a search of Belokon's residence, they would have had to have driven to his village Mohylivka in Vinnytsia, but that seems highly unlikely. For one thing, as will be discussed, Vetoshkin had spent the day interrogating Fedorchuk, Gavriliuk, and Gavriil Belik and deposing Vera Babenko, a witness. For another, while the distance was approximately 170 kilometres, the road conditions were poor and travelling was difficult.

In Belokon's arrest order issued on 27 November 1952 by Subbotin, his residence is listed as Mohilivka, Zhmerynka District, Kiev Oblast', instead of Vinnytsia Oblast' (1:7). No such village existed. The subsequent report written by Subbotin and Vetoshkin leaves the address of Belokon's residence empty (1:10).

In any case, the charges against Belokon' were graver than those against the others: even though he had no previous criminal record, Belokon' was accused of a long-standing career of proselytizing and 'anti-Soviet activity' directed at educating people in a spirit of 'hate and hostility' towards the Soviet government. The police marshalled several witnesses against him, Borzak, Darovskii, Arkhip Brovchenko, and his confessional rival, Ivan Kondrat'evich Noga, a priest of the legal Seventh-Day Adventist Church (1:4).

In fact, the police produced two additional witnesses to demonstrate Belokon's long-standing 'anti-Soviet activity' and to justify his arrest: Nikolai Andreevich Egorov, 53, and Antonina Maksimovna Bobysheva, 35. Egorov was first arrested in Kiev in August 1940 and sentenced in June 1941 to five years in the Gulag for 'anti-Soviet propaganda.' During the occupation of Kiev which soon followed, he managed to free himself. Egorov was re-arrested in 1948 in Kiev and despatched to a camp in Bratsk, East Siberia. Egorov testified that he had belonged to a group of Reformed Adventists in Kiev and took part in religious meetings. Although in general they did not discuss political matters, they considered all issues of life strictly from a biblical point of view. Therefore, they regarded it a crime not to observe the biblical commands. For the Reformed Adventists, Egorov insisted, the teaching of Adventism was a law higher than all other laws. Therefore, according to the police interrogation records, Egorov stated that the Soviet government rightly considered them 'anti-Soviet' people, their groups 'anti-Soviet organizations,' and their views of 'growing ignorance, debauchery, and moral degeneration in Soviet society' 'anti-Soviet slander.' They would never abandon their beliefs under any circumstances, even though they contained 'elements of an anti-Soviet nature,' and for this they were ready to suffer any punishment, because for them divine law was higher than the Soviet laws. Egorov named his co-believers, including Antonina Bobysheva, her mother Efrosiniia Bobysheva, and Belokon', among others. According to Egorov's statement, Antonina Bobysheva

was recruited by Belokon' into the sect of Reformed Adventists (2:133–5, 523).

Antonina Bobysheva was arrested in November 1948 in Kiev on charges of 'anti-Soviet propaganda.' She testified that she had become acquainted with Belokon' in the autumn of 1946 in Kiev. They had conversed on religious issues and she was persuaded by Belokon' to join the illegal sect of Reformed Adventists in Kiev. She named an additional seven men and women as members of the group. In February 1949 she was sentenced to ten years by the MGB special board (2:136–9, 525).

At any rate, the police presented Belokon' not merely as a follower of beliefs outlawed in the Soviet Union but a proselytizer whose activity stretched widely from Vinnytsia to Kiev and Bila Tserkva.⁴ Indeed, as the police would soon find, Belokon' proved to be an extraordinary person: unlike others arrested, he adamantly refused to cooperate with the police, under arrest and even under threat of harm.

As was their wont, before the arrests of these fourteen individuals, the police solicited 'references' ('character descriptions') of the arrested from local Soviet officials to strengthen the case against them. Regarding Belokon', the chairman of the village soviet of Mohylivka in Vinnytsia wrote on 25 November that Belokon' was born into a mid-level (i.e. neither poor nor rich) peasant family. He belonged to the sect of 'subbotniki' (or 'Saturdayists,' those who took Saturdays as the Sabbath, whom the chairman also called 'Stundists' [*shtundisty*]) and worked nowhere. Until the outbreak of the 'Great Patriotic War' (i.e. the Second World War) in 1941 Belokon' worked in Bila Tserkva as a quarrier. During the occupation period Belokon' returned to Mohylivka and agitated people to adopt his religion ('Stundism'). He conducted religious rites at home and every Saturday he travelled to the neighbouring village of Voroshylivka, where there was a large group of 'Stundists.'⁵ The village soviet did not know

⁴Kiev and the surrounding areas were a stronghold of Reformed Adventists in the post-war years. In 1946 in Kiev, according to the police, an illegal conference of Reformed Adventists took place. Three leaders present there were arrested in November and December 1947 and sentenced to 25 years in the Gulag for belonging to an 'anti-Soviet organization' and conducting 'anti-Soviet agitation.' Apparently there was a police agent among the preachers of the group. See N. Mitrokhin, ed., *Dokumenty po istorii Vsesoiuznoi tserkvi Vernykh i Svobodnykh Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia* (VTs VSASD) (Moscow, 1995), 67–8 and 99.

⁵Historically, 'Stundists' (from the German expression for Bible-study hours [Stun-

where he worked during or after the war. It knew only that Belokon' frequently travelled and returned home for a day or two, only to depart again. Belokon' claimed that he was in fact born in 1885, not in 1895, but the village soviet claimed that it had documents showing that his birth year was 1895. (The date of his birth probably mattered, because he appeared to justify his lack of occupation by his old age. If he was born in 1885, he would have been sixty-seven in 1952.)

His son Sergei, the chairman added, was also a 'Stundist.' He, too, worked nowhere. Like his father, he frequently journeyed to parts unknown. Sergei had a criminal record: in 1944, that is, after the liberation of Vinnytsia, he was sentenced to ten years for refusing to serve in the Soviet (Red) Army. With Vasili Belokon' lived his wife, Aleksandra, and another son, Mikhail. Neither worked, although Mikhail engaged in 'illegal trade' as a cobbler. Belokon's daughter, Ol'ga, 32, married, was working as a seamstress. Another son, Ivan, 28, married, lived separately in the neighbouring town of Hnyvans'k, working at its local cooperative (2:517–17v).

On the day of the arrests, the chairman of the village soviet in Popravka, 'G. Padalko' submitted three similar 'character descriptions', handwritten in Ukrainian (although filled with Russian phraseology), on three individuals. The first concerned Il'chenko. In 1930 she and her husband Lovgin Safronovich Il'chenko joined the collective farm of Popravka where in 1952 they still worked. (Here the village soviet differed from the police, who alleged that Fedora Il'chenko worked nowhere.) In terms of faith, they belonged to the sect of 'Subbotniki,' as did their daughter Liudmila, 18, but not their son Andrei, 22. The Il'chenkos did not hold any meetings in their house (2:514).

Padalko wrote a similar note on Babenko on the same day by longhand in a mix of Ukrainian and Russian. Babenko was a poor peasant. In 1930, like the Il'chenkos, he and his family (his wife and son) joined the collective farm of Popravka where he still worked. They belonged to

*[den]), refer to evangelical Christians influenced by the Stundist movement, part of the Pietist movement brought by German missionaries to the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century. The term also refers to numerous Evangelical Christians (including Baptists, Mennonites and many others) in Ukraine and Russia. See Sergei I. Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation: Peasants, Millennialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine, 1830–1917* (Washington, DC, 2004), 8–9, 155–9.*

what the villagers called ‘Subbotniki.’ For the past two years he had held meetings of believers in his own house. He was warned about the illegality of such meetings of unregistered believers. No other ‘compromising information’ was at hand (2:515).

Similarly, Padalko submitted another statement to the police on Borzak. Borzak engaged in agriculture before and after the 1917 revolution. In 1933 (namely at the time of the Great Famine in Ukraine), the family dispersed in search of work. Borzak himself left his family and went out for work and retained no contact with his family. In 1948, however, he returned to his wife in the village. In terms of faith, Borzak belonged to the sect of ‘Subbotniki.’ Lately he had begun to observe his faith and did not work on Saturdays, visiting another follower of the same sect Ivan Babenko. Padalko noted that no other ‘compromising’ material existed on Borzak (2:516).

The police had done much spade work on the arrested, all of whom but Belokon’ were apprehended simultaneously. It must have involved a considerable police force and coordination as well. Clearly the police deemed this case of special import.

2 Stalin, Religion, and the Adventists of Bila Tserkva

There is no private individual,
no matter how modest he may be,
who is not confronted with this necessity
for a solution between serving God and
keeping his commandments, and
serving *thohu*, the institutions of state.

Lev Tolstoi¹

THESE ARRESTS were merely a tiny part of the terror that the Soviet government had inflicted since the October 1917 revolution upon religious believers. Yet the arrests had historical significance in three respects: the timing (1952), the targets (Reformed Adventists), and the locus (Bila Tserkva, Ukraine).

Religion in the Post-War Years

Soviet Marxism competed with religion. Marxism in fact emerged as an alternative world view to religion, promising a paradise in this world. Considering the dismal state of the Soviet world, this situation clearly put religion at an advantage.

However, in one area of critical importance, religion was at a disadvantage in relation to Soviet Marxism: the latter possessed a means of coercion in the form of the Soviet government. Soviet Marxism did not so much compete with religion as fight against it with terror. As a former seminarian, Stalin knew well the hold that religion retained in the minds of the people. His own mother died a believer in 1937. Extensive campaigns, propaganda, and agitation against religion were conducted among the

¹Lev N. Tolstoy, *My Religion. On Life. Thoughts on God. On the Meaning of Life*, trans. Leo Wiener (London, 1904), 22.

masses of believers. Yet religious faith sustained popular resistance to the atheist regime.²

The brunt of Stalin's terror was aimed, among others, at the religious establishments (churches and sects) and their representatives (priests and preachers). By 1936, more than three quarters of the churches and houses of prayer that had functioned before the 1917 revolution had ceased to function. Fifty-six per cent of these buildings had been closed. In the Caucasus, as many as 83 per cent were shut down, in Ukraine 59 per cent, and in Russia 51 per cent. Although the collected data are incomplete, there were only about 30,000 churches and prayer houses still open for a population of more than 160 million people.³ The assault merely drove religion underground. Without priests or churches, believers met furtively in the woods or in private homes. To meet the needs of believers, 'wandering priests' began to appear here and there.⁴

It is an irony of history that Stalin's new, ostensibly progressive constitution (the 'Stalin Constitution') of 1936 was followed by the 'genocidal onslaught' of the Great Terror in 1937–8.⁵ Article 124 of the constitution read: 'In order to ensure to its citizens freedom of conscience, the church in the USSR is separated from the state, and the school from the church. Freedom of religious worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda

²See, for example, Richard L. Hernandez, 'Religious Politics and Political Religion: Rhetoric and Symbol in the Russian Village during the "Velikii Perelom," 1928–1932' (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2002).

³Arto Luukkanen, *The Religious Policy of the Stalinist State. A Case Study: The Central Standing Commission on Religious Questions, 1929–1938* (Helsinki, 1997), 139–40. According to one account, by 1936 in Ukraine more than 90 per cent and in the Soviet Union as a whole more than 70 per cent of the churches and prayer houses had been shut down. Quoted in *Na puti k svobode sovesti* (Moscow, 1989), 54.

⁴See, for instance, Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s–1990s* (Cambridge, 1998), 237, 239, 318.

⁵Rolf Binner and Marc Jung, 'Vernichtung der orthodoxen Geistlichen in der Sowjetunion in den Massenoperationen des Großen Terrors 1937–1938', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 52:4 (2004), 524. See also Gregory L. Freeze, 'The Stalinist Assault on the Parish, 1929–1941' in Manfred Hildermeier, ed., *Stalinismus vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg: Neue Wege der Forschung* (Munich, 1998). Although the terror against sects has been studied less than that against the Orthodox Church, see for the fate of some sects in the 1930s: Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905–1929* (Bloomington, IN, 2005) (Baptists), Laura Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom: A Russian Folktale* (Ithaca, NY, 1999) (about Skoptsy who practised castration); and *Vospominanija krest'ian-tolstovtsev, 1910–1930-e gody* (Moscow, 1989) (followers of Lev Tolstoy's pacifism).

are recognized for all citizens.' The constitution was no more than a paper document, issued for foreign consumption.

No one knows for certain whether religion in general declined or merely became less visible as a result. There is evidence, however, that the Soviet government was confounded to learn how persistent religion remained among the Soviet people. A census taken in early 1937, the only Soviet census that surveyed the religion of the population, surprised the government. The census revealed that as many as 84 per cent of the 'illiterate population' and 44 per cent of the 'literate population' had responded as believers. Excluding the one million or so who did not answer, approximately 56 per cent of the Soviet adult population (16 years and older) declared themselves to be believers.⁶ M.M. Khataevich, a member of the Ukrainian Communist Party politburo, told the Ukrainian party congress in May 1937: 'This was a complete surprise to all of us. We have overestimated our success in the fight against religious prejudices.'⁷ The possibility should not be excluded, however, that such astonishment was merely a pretext for delivering a coup de grace to the priests. Indeed, in the years following, they and numerous believers of all persuasions suffered inordinately.

The war Adolf Hitler unleashed against the Soviet Union in June 1941 actually altered Stalin's treatment of religion. When, after a long, eleven-day silence, Stalin addressed the nation, he opened his speech with 'Comrades! Citizens! Brothers and Sisters!'⁸ This last phrase, 'Brothers and Sisters!', was a conscious allusion to a similar expression used by the Orthodox Church. Stalin's aim was to marshal the support of believers for victory in the war.

The war and in particular foreign occupation revived religion to a significant degree,⁹ although not always in expected directions. While the Germans permitted the churches freedom, this very freedom provided a

⁶ *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniya 1937 goda': Obshchie itogi* (Moscow, 2007), 215–19. There were sexual and age differences: more women tended to be believers than men and more older than younger persons.

⁷ Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas*, 236.

⁸ I.V. Stalin, *Sochineniya 2 (15)* (Stanford, CA, 1967), 1.

⁹ A more cautious view is Karel Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), chap. 10 and Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 2001), 209–13.

space for resistance: ‘As harsh as the German occupation had been, in one respect it was more lenient than the atheist Soviet system: the churches were allowed to operate freely. In fact, the Nazi policy, presented as a policy of “God against the Devil,” probably worked against the occupiers, because many churches became hotbeds of [anti-Nazi] resistance.’¹⁰ During the war, almost 9000 new churches and prayer houses were opened in the occupied territory of the Soviet Union.¹¹

However much Stalin courted the support of the believers, he did not seek an official rapprochement (‘Concordat’) with the Orthodox Church until 1943, that is, until after the worst crisis of the war had been overcome. Stalin concluded the concordat when he began to consider the post-war order, and recognized the usefulness of a united church as an ally. The religious revival that had taken place under the occupation posed worrisome problems for Stalin. In the western borderlands, where the Greek Catholic (the Uniate) and other non-Orthodox churches and sects were traditionally strong, Stalin faced even more troublesome questions of the control of a population unaccustomed to Soviet rule. Stalin concluded the concordat with the Russian Orthodox Church in order to establish and consolidate, in these borderlands, an ecclesiastical order he could control. He reasoned that using the Orthodox Church would help him to overcome ideological barriers with the peoples in the Soviet-occupied territory of Eastern Europe more effectively than by Marxism alone. Stalin also conceived of creating a ‘counter-Vatican’ (or ‘the Vatican of Moscow’) out of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy. Through Orthodox parishes that existed in numerous countries, Stalin envisaged the expansion of Soviet influence throughout much of the world. The concordat had the added benefit of demonstrating for Western democracies the Soviet government’s tolerance of the Church.¹²

¹⁰ Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin (Profiles in Power)* (Harlow, 2005), 174.

¹¹ ‘Religioznye organizatsii v SSSR v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny (1943–1945 gg.)’, *Otechestvennye arkhiwy*, 1995, no. 3, 54.

¹² Pavel Sudoplatov and Anatoli Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness – a Soviet Spymaster* (Boston, 1994), 161. For the connection between religion and Soviet foreign policy, see Steven Merritt Miner, *Stalin’s Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941–1945* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003) and William C. Fletcher, *Religion and Soviet Foreign Policy 1945–1970* (London, 1973). This connection was clearly seen by the American ambassador to the Soviet Union, Walter Bedell Smith (1946–1948), *My Three Years in Moscow* (Philadelphia–New York, 1950), 268 and 272. Stalin was always sensitive

This proved to be no easy task. For Stalin, the Church was merely a weapon to use when it served his political purposes. He did not favour the Church per se. His persecution of religion and faith in general remained consistent.¹³ To bolster the Orthodox Church and counter the influence of the Vatican, Stalin abolished in 1945–6 the Greek Catholic Church (whose four-million strong followers resided mainly in the newly incorporated Western Ukraine) and merged it with the Orthodox Church.¹⁴ With the onset of the Cold War, however, his conception of a pan-Orthodox global network suffered a setback, and his grandiose plan did not materialize. Having by then secured much of Eastern Europe under the Soviet sphere of influence, however, Stalin began to lose interest in the Church. The concordat became devoid of substance. From October 1948 until Stalin's death in March 1953, no new Orthodox church was allowed to open in the Soviet Union.¹⁵

The Church thrived nonetheless. The American ambassador, Walter Bedell Smith, who observed the Easter celebration in Moscow in 1946, noted that it was 'a convincing proof of the fact that while the Communist Party has been successful in retaining that which is Caesar's, its direct efforts to capture also that which is God's has been quietly but decisively rejected by the masses of the older Russian people.'¹⁶ Two months before Stalin's death, on the day of Orthodox Christmas (7 January 1953), the Annunciation Cathedral in Kharkiv, for example, overflowed with 5000 people. On the same day, St Volodymyr's (Vladimir's) Cathedral in Kiev

to foreign critics of religious persecution in the Soviet Union. Remarkably, in 1930, in order to refute foreign critics (including the pope and the archbishop of Canterbury), he even faked and dictated an 'interview' of the Russian Orthodox Church metropolitan bishop supposedly given to Soviet journalists. See I.A. Kurliandskii, 'Stalin i "interv'iu" mitropolita Sergiiia sovetskimi korrespondentam v 1930 godu,' *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, 2010, no. 2, 157–69.

¹³ For a contrary view that 'the denial and persecution of religious beliefs and practices was not central to Stalinism,' see Julianne Fürst, 'Not a Question of Faith – Youth and Religion in the Post-War Years,' *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 52 (2004), 570. For a very judicious discussion of religion and Stalinism, see Jörg Baberowski, 'Stalinismus und Religion,' *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 52:4 (2004), esp. 487 and 491.

¹⁴ See *Likvidatsia UHKTs (1939–1946). Dokumenty radians'kykh orhaniv derzhavnoi bezpeky*, vol. 2 (Kiev, 2006).

¹⁵ M.V. Shkalovskii, 'Smena religioznnoi politiki Sovetskogo gosudarstva v gody voiny i ee posledtviiia,' *Aktual'nye problemy arkheografii, istochnikovedeniia i istoriografii* (Vologda, 1995), 365.

¹⁶ Smith, *My Three Years in Moscow*, 264.

was attended by 3000 people. On the eve of Easter in that year, which took place on 5 April, 18 days after Stalin's death, 7000 filled St. Volodymyr's Cathedral and another 3000 gathered outside.¹⁷

Like the Orthodox Church, many Protestant sects, too, thrived during and after the Second World War. The incorporation of Western Ukraine, formerly part of Poland, and other non-Soviet territories (Transcarpathia and Northern Bukovyna, formerly part of Czechoslovakia/Hungary and Rumania respectively), into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic introduced a host of new sects into the Soviet Union. Moving to the east in search of work, people from these regions brought new faiths, new organizations, and religious vigour with them to the rest of Ukraine and beyond. The Orthodox Church's concordat with the Soviet government appeared to many sectarians as a betrayal – in 'service of the Antichrist'.¹⁸ The result was a spur to the Protestant sects.¹⁹ On 1 July 1945, the sect of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, for example, held baptismal rites for forty of its new members in the city of Kiev. The rite took place on the banks of the Dnieper River, attracting 2000 spectators. When Soviet authorities ordered it to be removed to a less populated area of the city, the order was ignored.²⁰ In Voroshylovgrad Oblast', there were about 10,000 Baptists in 1945, many of whom were said to be youths.²¹ In Stalino Oblast', Easter (6 May) 1945 witnessed two to three times as many church-goers as in 1941. As many as 2000 to 3000 attended church.²² It is said that in the Soviet Union there were more Adventists in 1946 than before the Second World War.²³

¹⁷ Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromads'kykh ob'iednan' (TsDAHO, Kiev, Ukraine), f. 1, op. 24, spr. 3000, ark. 2, 66.

¹⁸ Derzhavnyi arkhiv Luhans'koi oblasti (Luhans'k, Ukraine), f. R-179, op. 3, spr. 307, ark. 16.

¹⁹ No data are available on the confessional statistics of Soviet believers in the 1940s. According to the 1937 census, by far the largest church was the Orthodox Church. Approximately three quarters of believers in the Soviet Union in the 1930s professed Orthodoxy, about 10 % Islam, 0.8 % Protestantism, 0.7 % Catholicism, 1 % other Christian faiths, 0.5 % Judaism, 0.15 % Buddhism, and 6.3 % other religions. Calculated from *Vsesoiuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1937 g. Kratkie itogi* (Moscow, 1991), 106. Only those older than 16 years of age were counted.

²⁰ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 1640, ark. 25.

²¹ Ibid., spr. 1641, ark. 13.

²² Ibid., spr. 1640, ark. 50.

²³ A. F. Parasei and N. A. Zhukaliuk, *Bednaia, brosaemaia bureiu . . . : Istoricheskie ocherki*

Ultimately, Stalin sought to control the Protestant sects as he had the Orthodox Church by creating a unified organization of Protestant sects: ‘one national structure for Orthodoxy and one national Protestant Church structure’.²⁴ The Soviet government proposed to unite the Baptists and Evangelical Christians by convening a congress of church union in October 1944. (Although the Pentecostals, too, subsequently joined the union, a considerable number eventually deserted it.) ‘Many of the delegates were released from prison to attend the congress’ and therefore ‘for many years members harboured suspicion that these leaders had compromised their faith in order to be released, and that this explained their cautious leadership, their counsels of restraint to energetic pastors, and their loud public pronouncements on behalf of Soviet peace policies’.²⁵ Many smaller Protestant groups such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Seventh-Day Adventists were destined to be eliminated through the program of compulsory registration: for religious groups to exist legally, they had to be registered with the Soviet government; in refusing registration, they were driven underground.²⁶

As with the Orthodox Church, the Soviet government’s engagement with the Protestant union faded after 1947,²⁷ with the result that official Protestant activity also declined. If in 1949 there were 1607 Evangelical Christian–Baptist communities with 1952 priests officially registered with the Soviet government, by 1953 the number of communities had declined to 1367 and priests to 1822. In Kiev Oblast’ in 1945 there were 604 churches and houses of worship. By 1952 there were 503.²⁸ Protestants accounted for approximately one per cent of the believers in the Soviet Union. They bore the brunt of religious persecution, however. From 1 January 1947 to 1 June 1948, for example, fifty-four per cent of the nearly

k 110-letnemu iubileiu Tserkvi adventistov sed’mogo dnia v Ukraine (Kiev, 1997), 49.

²⁴Walter Sawatsky, ‘Protestantism in the USSR,’ in Sabrina Petra Ramet, ed., *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, 1993), 323.

²⁵Ibid. See also Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2007), 57–8.

²⁶In 1945–6, however, the Soviet government was not so determined about the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, which was allowed to register. See *Iz istorii Tserkvi adventistov sed’mogo dnia v Rossii* (Kalininograd, 1993), 123, and Marite Sapiets, *True Witness: The Story of Seventh-day Adventists in the Soviet Union* (Keston, Eng. [1990?]), 60.

²⁷Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II* (Kitchener, ON, 1981), 99.

²⁸TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, spr. 3000, ark. 17; op. 23, spr. 250, ark. 7; and spr. 1640, ark. 67.

two thousand priests and believers arrested for political crimes belonged to the Protestant sects.²⁹ It was in this period of renewed assault on Protestant sects that the fourteen Adventists were arrested in Bila Tserkva.

The Adventists and the Law of God

The Seventh-Day Adventist movement, officially formed in 1863 in the United States, grew out of the Millerite movement (after its Baptist leader-prophet William Miller [1782–1849]) and the ‘Great Disappointment’ (at the failure of Miller’s prophesy of the Second Advent of Jesus Christ in 1843). The Seventh-Day Adventists were ‘the most vital group to emerge from the debacle of the Great Disappointment.’ Adventism formed in the American tradition of ‘civil millennialism,’ which ‘represented a convergence of the Puritan apocalyptic tradition with a libertarian ideology of dissent.’ ‘Having defined themselves in opposition to the state,’ the Adventists perceived themselves and the American nation ‘as two rival groups competing to realize their respective millennia.’³⁰ If the Soviet secret police understood all this, Adventism probably appeared to them as doubly dangerous: American by birth and dissident by nature.

Seventh-Day Adventism was brought to the Russian Empire in the 1880s by missionaries to German colonists in the Crimea, the Volga, and Caucasus regions. As a ‘foreign’ Protestant religion, it was treated with much suspicion. In 1952, when the trial of Adventists took place, Adventism, like other denominations that originated in the United States (such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons) had become all the more politically suspect under the conditions of the Cold War.

Adventism initially spread almost exclusively among the peasants in the Russian Empire. Because Adventist missionaries targeted the German colonizers, many ‘Russian’ Adventists were of German origin. (All the defendants at the 1952 trial with which the present book is concerned were of peasant origin, but none was German by ethnicity: all were ethnic Ukrainians.) In 1906, in the wake of the 1905 revolution, the tsarist government recognized Adventism in Russia. By 1914, when the First

²⁹I.A. Kurlandskii, *Stalin, vlast’, religii* (Moscow, 2011), 558, 574.

³⁰Malcolm Bull, ‘The Seventh-Day Adventists: Heretics of American Civil Religion,’ *Sociological Analysis* 50:2 (1989), 180, 182, 183.

World War broke out, there were about 7000 followers of Adventism in the Russian Empire, with their headquarters in Riga (in today's Latvia).³¹ Accused of 'being infused with Germanism,' many were deported from Ukraine.³² During the October 1917 revolution and the subsequent civil war, the Adventists assumed a neutral position.³³

The doctrine of any faith can be complex and any discussion of it open to accusations of misrepresentation. Adventism, with its emphasis on evangelical teachings and the imminence of the Second Coming or Second Advent, is no exception. The Soviet regime treated with suspicion all religion as an alternative moral universe to Marxism. Religious groups such as the Adventist Church that were intensely missionary were all the more suspect. With regards to Adventism, two doctrinal issues in particular concerned the Soviet government: Sabbatarianism (the Saturday Sabbath) and pacifism. Both stemmed from particular interpretations of the Ten Commandments, which the Adventists believed embodied the principles of the Law of God.

The Fourth Commandment regarding the Sabbath is based on Exodus 20:8–11: 'Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.' Based on this and other texts of the Bible, the Adventist doctrine reads: 'That the fourth commandment of this unchangeable law requires the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. This holy institution is at the same time a memorial of creation and a sign of sanctification, a sign of the believer's rest

³¹ See Alf Lohne, *Adventists in Russia* (Washington, DC, 1987), chaps. 6–8, and Daniel Heinz, 'Origin and Growth of the Adventists in Russia: A Historical Survey,' *Journal of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia*, 10:4 (Winter 1987) 39–40. For Adventism in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in general, see Sapiets, *True Witness*, *Iz istorii Tserkvi adventistov sed'mogo dnia v Rossii*, and A.V. Belov, *Adventizm* (Moscow, 1968).

³² Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 153 and 231.

³³ N. Mitrokhin, ed., *Dokumenty po istorii Vsesoiuznoi tserkvi Vernykh i Svobodnykh Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia* (VTs VSASD) (Moscow, 1995), 5–6.

from his own works of sin, and his entrance into the rest of soul which Jesus promises to those who come to Him.³⁴ Regarding the Sunday Sabbath (associated with the Sun God or Christ's resurrection or the 'Lord's Day') as heretical, the Adventists counter-posed the Saturday (seventh-day) Sabbath as truly Christian – and true to the Commandment.

The Saturday Sabbath came naturally to many Slavs, since in Ukrainian and Russian (as well as other Slavic languages) the word Saturday (*subota*, *subбота*) literally meant 'Sabbath.' There were sectarians who observed the Saturday Sabbath ('Saturdayists' or Saturday Sabbatarians [*subotnyky*, *subbotniki*]). Influenced by Jewish intellectuals, they 'shared the same interest in the Hebrew religious background of the first Christian communities described in the Acts of the Apostles.'³⁵ Adventism eventually absorbed many of them.

The Saturday Sabbath itself was of no special concern to the Soviet government (although the tsarist government regarded it as heretical and persecuted the Adventists). It interfered with the Soviet calendar, however. Although the Soviet government initially retained the traditional seven-day week, in 1929 the government abolished it and introduced a new, rationalized five-day week. Just as the Jacobins in France replaced the traditional calendar with a new, revolutionary one, the Bolsheviks created their own new, revolutionary calendar (in which there was no Saturday or Sunday), partly in order to make a break with the traditional, religious calendar. With the new calendar, the Bolsheviks also hoped to optimize the productive cycle of industrial life.

Yet the new calendar created so much chaos and confusion that the traditional calendar was soon restored. In 1940, in anticipation of war, the

³⁴ *Seventh-Day Adventists Answer Questions of Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-Day Adventist Belief* (Washington, DC, 1957), 12.

³⁵ Sergei I. Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation: Peasants, Millennialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine, 1830–1917* (Washington, DC, 2004), 126 and Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY, 2005), 12. This theme is detailed in Sergei Zhuk, 'The Ukrainian Stundists and Russian Jews: A Collaboration of Evangelical Peasants with Jewish Intellectuals in Late Imperial Russia,' in Daniel Brett, Claire Jarvis, and Irina Marin, eds, *Four Empires and an Enlargement. States, Societies and Individuals: Transfiguring Perspectives and Images of Central and Eastern Europe* (London, 2008), 17–32. 'In their cultural protest,' the Sabbatarians and Stundists 'preferred to associate with German colonists or even Jewish city dwellers rather than the Orthodox peasants' (31). Hence their deportations during the First World War (see p. 42).

Soviet government abolished a five-day, 40-hour work week (with Sunday and Saturday off) and introduced a six-day, 48-hour work week (with only Sunday off). This was in effect in 1952 when the trial against the Adventists in Bila Tserkva took place. In the Soviet Union at the time, not to work on Saturdays constituted not a criminal offence but a disciplinary one.³⁶ Nevertheless, observing the Saturday Sabbath signified an open challenge to Soviet practices (if not Soviet laws) in the eyes of Soviet authorities. Advocacy of a practice that was meant to undermine Soviet daily life constituted a criminal offence.

The other article of divine law that the Adventists took as inviolable, the Sixth Commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ (*Exodus 20:13*), did signify an open challenge to the Soviet government. Adding to this Jesus’s own command, ‘But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you’ (*Matthew 5:44*), the Adventists generally took the Sixth Commandment to preclude military service. The 1936 Stalin constitution explicitly states: ‘Universal military service is law. Military service in the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army is the honourable duty of the citizens of the USSR’ (article 132) and ‘To defend the Fatherland is the sacred duty of every citizen of the USSR’ (article 133). The Law of Universal Military Service of 1 September 1939 stipulated ‘obligatory military service for all male citizens 19 years of age or older and pre-service training of secondary and vocational school students.’ The 1939 law ‘did not allow any exemption due to religious conviction’³⁷ This law was still in effect in 1952. Thus, refusing military service constituted a grave criminal offence, almost an act of treachery. There was no room for conscientious objection under Soviet law.

³⁶ Unauthorized absenteeism could have constituted a crime, however. The 1940 law that criminalized unauthorized absenteeism and tardiness was largely repealed in 1951, but the 1951 decree was *not* published at the time; see Peter H. Solomon, Jr., *Soviet Criminal Justice under Stalin* (Cambridge, 1996), 423. Even before the 1951 decree was issued, however, the draconian 1940 law was applied only haphazardly. However, by dint of secret decrees, those members of collective farms ‘who stubbornly refuse to participate in socially useful labor’ could be banished beyond the borders of Ukraine. See Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 319–20.

³⁷ F. J. M. Feldbrugge, G. P. van den Berg, and William B. Simons, eds, *Encyclopedia of Soviet Law*, 2nd ed. (Dordrecht, 1985), 507–8.

Religious pacifism per se was not new to Russia and the Soviet Union. Nor was it limited to Adventism. The question of pacifism and military service has a long history in almost any society. In Britain, the Quakers were exempted from military duties in the eighteenth century. The Adventists in the United States acquired a similar right during the Civil War in the mid-nineteenth century. In Russia, the German-speaking Mennonites were allowed to perform logging duties instead of military service in the 1870s. Moreover, there were in Russia other followers of radical anti-militarism such as the indigenous Christian sects of Molokans, Dukhobors and 'Malevantsy,' 'Jehovists' ('Il'intsy'), and the Tolstoyans (followers of Lev Tolstoy's Christian socialism). Along with the more numerous Evangelical Christians (particularly Baptists), they were all persecuted to one degree or another. Most of the Dukhobors fled from tsarist persecution by emigrating, with the help of Tolstoy and others, to Canada at the close of the nineteenth century. Two other groups known for pacifism were Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals.³⁸ Their faiths spread to Russia only after 1914.

As was the case with socialist internationalism, the most serious test of pacifism came with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Most pacifist religious groups were torn between loyalty to their faith (which cut across national borders) and patriotism. The Adventists were no exception. As a result, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church split. In Germany, a major combatant in the war, the Adventist leaders permitted participation in the war by the German Adventists who were conscripted to bear arms in defence of their country without regard for the Saturday Sabbath. A minority of Adventists who refused to accept the Church decision were disfellowshipped. The same was the case in Russia. When war broke out, the leaders of the Adventist Church pled allegiance to the state, declaring that Adventist men 'would go to war and would remain true and faithful to the tsar.' Thus, Adventists on opposing sides in the war fought 'to the honour and glory of God.' This led a minority of Adventists to wonder: 'If the true people of God "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth," will He actually lead them to the battlefield to kill each other? . . . So they refused to go.'³⁹

³⁸ Strictly speaking, Jehovah's Witnesses are not pacifists but neutralists. They consider themselves soldiers in the army of Jehovah and therefore do not bear arms for any secular state which they regard as being in the service of Satan.

³⁹ A. Balbach, *The History of the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement* (Roanoke, VA,

The pacifism of Russian Adventists proved very strong, partly because many were ethnic Germans who did not wish to fight against the country of their ancestry and partly because among them were many converts from the Mennonite and Baptist faiths. During the First World War, the ‘dissemination of Adventist literature had to be discontinued. Through special edicts the Adventists were also forbidden from gathering for church services and missionary conferences.’⁴⁰ Between 1914 and 1916, according to an official Church account, the majority of 500 or so conscripted Russian Adventists were given alternative, non-combatant services (such as in sanitary units). Out of the conscripted Adventists, however, 74 refused any service related to the military. Of the 74, 37 were sentenced to one to eight years of imprisonment or exile. (Sergei Borzak, one of the defendants in the 1952 trial in Bila Tserkva was an Adventist of long standing who was incarcerated for refusing military service in 1914. As discussed earlier, he was released when the revolution occurred in Russia in 1917. He was not an ethnic German but a Ukrainian.) The majority of those sentenced were peasants and there were no pastors or ministers among them.⁴¹

Like the conscientious refuseniks, many Bolsheviks opposed the war, but for a different reason. They wanted not an imperial war but a revolutionary class war. Still, as champions of the oppressed, the Bolsheviks initially upheld the right to conscientious objection. And many sectarians were willing to work, to a degree, with the new Soviet government. In 1918 the Soviet government recognized the right to exemption from military service on the grounds of religious conviction. More than 40,000 are said to have enjoyed this right.⁴² As the ranks of conscientious objectors expanded rapidly, however, the Soviet government began to suspect that enemies of the Soviet government were using the mantle of conscience to oppose the class war (in the form of civil war).⁴³ In 1920 the government

1999), 364–5.

⁴⁰Heinz, ‘Origin and Growth of the Adventists in Russia,’ 40.

⁴¹See Peter Brock, *Freedom from Violence: Sectarian Nonresistance from the Middle Ages to the Great War* (Toronto, 1991), 354–5. For the list of denominations of more than 800 conscientious objectors who were convicted by military courts between 1914 and 1918, see F.M. Putintsev, *Politicheskaiia rol’ i taktika sekt* (Moscow, 1935), 96–7. The largest contingents were Evangelical Christians (256), followed by Baptists-Stundists (114) and Adventists (70).

⁴²Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals*, 116.

⁴³T.A. Pavlova, ‘Istoricheskie sud’by rossiiskogo patsifizma,’ *Voprosy istorii*, 1998, no. 8,

began to curtail the right to conscientious objection. Some conscientious objectors (Baptists and Evangelical Christians) were even executed.⁴⁴

Soon the Soviet government demanded the sectarians renounce pacifism altogether: 'Denunciation of pacifism became the litmus test of loyalty to the Soviet state.' In 1926 the congresses of Baptists and Evangelical Christians were thus forced to condemn pacifism.⁴⁵ Those who refused to accept the 1926 decisions joined the Pentecostals. However, they, too, were compelled to 'issue a loyalty statement' the following year. 'Of all the evangelicals, only the Mennonites did not submit a declaration of loyalty to the Soviet state.' Even so, after 1929 'the arrest of ministers, closure of churches or the direct threat of arrest forced nearly all eligible Mennonites to accept military service.'⁴⁶

The Seventh-Day Adventists, too, came to terms with the Soviet government. In 1924, deeming it necessary to 'integrate themselves into Soviet society,' the Fifth All-Union Congress of Seventh-Day Adventists declared: 'We are convinced that God, in His providence, has disposed the heart of our unforgettable V.I. Lenin and his closest associates and given them wisdom in the capable organization of the only progressive and up-to-date apparatus of government in the world.' Expressing their 'gratitude and sincere support for all the freedoms it has won' to the Soviet government, the congress permitted the Adventists to bear arms, serving the state at all times, 'according to the rules established for all citizens.'⁴⁷ At the next congress in 1928, the church required, not merely permitted, the Adventists to bear arms, declaring that the Soviet authorities

are ordained of God to protect the faithful and punish the wicked . . . The Seventh-Day Adventists are bound to 'render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's,' accepting state civil and military service in all forms, on the same basis as all other citizens. Anyone who teaches otherwise and incites others to avoid state duties will be regarded by the congress as a false teacher, setting himself against the teaching of the Holy Scrip-

^{33–4.}

⁴⁴ *Dolgi put' rossiiskogo patsifizma* (Moscow, 1997), 278.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 116–17.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴⁷ Balbach, *History*, 365, 370, and *Iz istorii Tserkvi adventistov sed'mogo dnia* 73–6.

tures, breaking the unity of God's Church and placing himself outside the Seventh-day Adventist organization.⁴⁸

At the time, there were 600 congregations with more than 13,400 members in the country.⁴⁹

This position split the Adventist Church. Under the influence of the Adventist Reform Movement coming from Germany, '70 elders, workers and ministers, together with many members, left the Adventist denomination.'

They refused to accept what they called enforced state atheism, refused to register their congregations as required by Soviet law, and consequently exist to this day [1979] illegally. The Reformed Adventists prohibited their children from joining state youth organizations such as the Young Communists, and refused military service. They absolutely would not work or attend school on Saturday. Both are required in the Soviet Union.⁵⁰

These schismatics, regarding the official Adventist Church as apostatized, subsequently called themselves the 'True and Free Seventh Day Adventists.' Of the 13,400 members of the Church, only 1000 to 2000 appear to have joined the Reformists.⁵¹ To complicate the matter, however, the Soviet Reformist Adventists did not approve of the German-based international Reform Adventists, considering the latter 'unholy' for claiming to be merely a 'movement,' not the true Adventist Church.⁵²

Although the Soviet Law on Religious Associations of 1929 did not deprive the Soviet citizens of the right to religious worship, it did prohibit 'religious propaganda.' Moreover,

almost all forms of religious activity had become illegal apart from services held in a building registered by the local state authorities. All forms of evangelism, except sermons in church, were banned; so were religious instruction classes (especially for children) . . . Children could legally be taught religious doctrines only by their parents. It was now against the law for religious be-

⁴⁸Balbach, *History*, 378, Sapiets, *True Witness*, 55–6, and Lohne, *Adventists in Russia*, 104.

⁴⁹Sapiets, *True Witness*, 48.

⁵⁰Balbach, *History*, 370.

⁵¹Mitrokhin, ed., *Dokumenty*, 7.

⁵²Ibid., 6.

lievers to hold prayer meetings in their own homes, in the open air or in any ‘unregistered’ places . . . Any pastors, preachers or ministers also had to be approved by the local authorities.

The Reformed Adventists regarded the rejection of these restrictions (accepted by the official Adventist Church) as ‘a decisive protest against the interference of the impure Caesar in the realm of God.’⁵³ Those Reformed Adventists who refused to toe the state-sponsored official line came immediately under police surveillance, and many were soon arrested. According to an account of Reformed Adventists, the leaders of the official Adventist Church acted as informers for the police in this process,⁵⁴ just as in Nazi Germany the mainstream Adventists (who cooperated with the totalitarian system in order to survive as a group) informed on the Reformed Adventists who refused to be co-opted.⁵⁵

In 1931 and 1932, more than 1000 conscientious objectors were performing alternative service in place of military service in the Soviet Union.⁵⁶ How many of them were Adventists is not known. The relatively benign treatment of pacifists, however, was soon to end.⁵⁷

In spite of their pledge of loyalty, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church was destined for extinction. After 1929 all relations abroad were cut off by the Soviet government. In December 1931 the Adventist Church was allowed to have a nation-wide congress, which was used by the secret police to identify its leaders and orientations. Using the information thus obtained, the police went on to virtually liquidate it.⁵⁸ Three thousand Adventists are believed to have been arrested in the 1930s. Of the 150 preachers the Church had at its disposal at the time, all but two were arrested.⁵⁹ ‘All Adventist churches were closed by 1938.’⁶⁰ All this hap-

⁵³ Sapiets, *True Witness*, 56–8.

⁵⁴ Balbach, *History*, 377–81.

⁵⁵ Christine Elizabeth King, *The Nazi State and the New Religions: Five Case Studies in Non-Conformity* (New York, 1982), 110, 114.

⁵⁶ *Dolgii put' rossiiskogo patsifizma*, 279.

⁵⁷ See A.I. Savin, ‘Al’ternativnaia grazhdanskaiia sluzhba v Sovetskoi Rossii v 1920–1930-e gody: normativno-pravovoe pole i prakticheskaiia organizatsiia,’ in *Instituty grazhdanskogo obshchestva v Sibiri (XX–nachalo XXI v.)* (Novosibirsk, 2009), 93.

⁵⁸ V. Voinalovich, *Partiino-derzhavnna polityka shchodo relihiii ta relihiynikh instytutsii v Ukrayini 1940–1960-kh rokiv: Politolohichnyi dyskurs* (Kiev, 2005), 494.

⁵⁹ M. Kulakov, ‘Tserkov’ i mech gosudarstva,’ *Gosudarstvennaiia bezopasnost’ i demokratiia*, no. 2 (March 1993), 57.

⁶⁰ Sapiets, *True Witness*, 59.

pened even though the 1936 Stalin constitution guaranteed freedom of conscience. There are few data on the fate of Reformed Adventists. Their fate is not hard to imagine, however, in light of the fact that the officially sanctioned Seventh-Day Adventist Church was virtually liquidated.

As discussed earlier, the Second World War and the German occupation changed the religious scene: religion in general revived with a vengeance. Like other pacifist churches, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church was placed under strict observation by the Soviet secret police, especially for any tendency to take on the colouration of the Reformist movement of pacifists. In 1945, a third-year student at the Dnipropetrov's'k Medical Institute named Muntian, a Seventh-Day Adventist, refused to bear arms when called up for military service. Six students from the Institute petitioned Soviet authorities to exempt him from the duty. The leader of the Seventh-Day Adventist community there, Liutaia, declared: 'The whole community of Seventh-Day Adventists regards military service negatively, but we leave this up to each member to decide independently. We have disfellowshipped one member, however, who has agreed to bear arms.' The Soviet official who reported on Liutaia added, 'Liutaia assured [me] that the national centre of the Adventists also regards military service negatively'.⁶¹ The activity of Seventh-Day Adventists was severely restricted and the numbers of Seventh-Day Adventist communities and ministers declined. (In 1949 there were 225 Adventist communities with 74 ministers in Ukraine, but by 1953 they had declined to 168 and 53 respectively).⁶²

The Seventh-Day Adventists, however, fared better than the Jehovah's Witnesses, who were deported wholesale to Siberia and other remote areas for their faith, especially for their refusal to take on civil and military duties.⁶³ In 1951, for example, 2000 Jehovah's Witnesses families were

⁶¹ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 1640, ark. 24.

⁶² Ibid., f. 1, op. 24, spr. 3000, ark. 17. Another source lists 141 Seventh-Day Adventist communities with 171 ministers and 5000 members for 1948 in Ukraine. Voinalovych, *Partiino-derzhavna polityka*, 680. There were cases of arson attacks on Adventist churches. See P.M. Bondarchuk, *Rel'iinist' naselennia Ukrayiny u 40–80-kh rokakh XX st.: sotsiokul'turni vplyvy, osoblyvosti, tendentsii zmin* (Kiev: Instytut istorii Ukrayiny NAN Ukrayiny, 2009), 46

⁶³ See M.I. Odintsov, *Sovet ministrov SSSR postanovliaet: 'Vyselit' navechno!'* Shornik dokumentov i materialov o Svideteliakh Iegovy v Sovetskem Soiuze (1951–1985 gg.) (Moscow, 2002). They were also persecuted in Nazi Germany: thousands of them are believed

deported from Western Ukraine to Siberia.⁶⁴ (Likewise, from 1944 to 1953, 10,000 Baptists and Pentecostals and their families were deported from Western Belarus' and northwestern regions of Ukraine.)⁶⁵

Numerous Reformed Adventists perished in the Gulag, but a few survived, including Vladimir Andreevich Shelkov, who, after release from the Gulag in 1935, survived by changing 'his place of residence 12 times' between 1934 and 1945, only to be arrested again in 1945. After Stalin's death Shelkov became a noted activist for human rights in the Soviet Union.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, few data exist on the Reformed Adventists driven underground as 'anti-Soviet.' There is some information, however, on Vinnytsia Oblast', which was said to have ranked at the top for 'anti-Soviet' religious activity in Ukraine. In 1950 Soviet authorities counted 105 Reformed Adventists in 8 groups. The numbers increased to 131 and 9 in 1951 and 400 and 11 in 1953 respectively.⁶⁷ No doubt, the war and occupation spurred the movement of Reformed Adventists.

Even so, virtually no organized activity was possible because of strict police surveillance. Instead, police agents and provocateurs were afoot to entrap individual believers who held their faith deeply private, as was the case with those arrested in Bila Tserkva in 1952.

Pacifism and the refusal of military service were not restricted to the Reformed Adventists. 'Millennianists' (or 'Bible Students,' followers of Charles Taze Russell), who, according to Soviet authorities, regarded kings, princes, tsars, and statesmen as tools of the devil and the state as the devil's institution for the oppression of people, refused to serve in the military. In 1944 in Chernihiv Oblast', 15 'Millennianists' were prosecuted for refusing military service.⁶⁸ In the city of Voroshylovhrad,

to have died in concentration camps. See M. James Penton, *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Third Reich: Sectarian Politics under Persecution* (Toronto, 2004) and Detlef Garbe, *Between Resistance and Martyrdom: Jehovah's Witnesses in the Third Reich* (Madison, WI, 2008).

⁶⁴Bondarchuk, *Relihiinist' naselennia Ukrayny*, 46.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Sapiets, *True Witness*, 69. For Shelkov's life, see his wife's account in Mitrokhin, ed., *Dokumenty*, 22–64.

⁶⁷TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, spr. 2741, ark. 125. There were 20 Dukhobors, 30 'Jehovists,' 60 'Red Dragonites' (*Krasnodrakonovtsy*), and 3500 Pentecostals as well.

⁶⁸Ibid., f. 1, op. 23, spr. 1640, ark. 200–1. The report also noted that there were believers called 'Apocalypsists' but that Ukrainian Soviet authorities had absolutely no

there were about 30 'Ioannists' (followers of Ioann Kronshtadskii, a Russian Orthodox saint canonized in 1990 who is known to have supported the anti-Semitic reactionary group called the 'Black Hundreds' early in the twentieth century). Its leader, Mariia Olimpievna Shpekht, and other members were arrested, according to the Ukrainian secret police, for, among other crimes, advocating opposition to military service.⁶⁹ Many reports about Baptists refusing to serve in the military also came to Kiev from provinces.⁷⁰

It was under these circumstances of religious revival that the 1952 trial of Adventists took place in Bila Tserkva. A report (*spravka*) submitted to the prosecution by the Soviet government's Council of Religious Affairs in Kiev is instructive. Dated 22 November 1952, the report noted that the Reformed Adventists, followers of the American farmer and Baptist William Miller, were:

a reactionary and fanatical sect, do not recognize the government and preach 'Thou shalt not bear arms.' This sect, according to its dogmas, does not approve of consumption of many products (meat, tea, coffee, etc), considering them harmful for health.⁷¹ This leads those who come under its influence to exhaustion, insanity and so on.

Reformed Adventists and other reactionary and fanatical religious sects (such as Malevantsy and Jehovahs) that inflict physical and mental deformity on people cannot be registered with us [the Soviet government] and operate, as a rule, illegally in the Soviet Union.

The existence and the activity of this sect [of Reformed Adventists] are against the [Soviet] law (2:528–9).

information on their political views.

⁶⁹Ibid., sp. 1641, ark. 10–11.

⁷⁰Ibid., op. 24, spr. 300, ark. 14; spr. 3800, ark. 104.

⁷¹The Adventists believe that 'our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit' and deem it to be 'our Christian duty to preserve our bodies in the best health for the service and glory of God.' (*Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions of Doctrine*, 624). Ellen G. White, the founder of the Adventist movement said in 1902: 'Let the members of our churches deny every selfish appetite. Every penny expended for tea, coffee, and flesh meat is worse than wasted; for these things hinder the best development of the physical, mental, and spiritual powers.' White, *Medical Ministry: A Treatise on Medical Missionary Work in the Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Nampa, ID, 2003), 274.

Whether the author actually believed in this rigmarole was of little import. What mattered was the political significance of the faith, for everything was politicized under Stalin.

Because freedom of conscience was guaranteed by the Stalin constitution, believers were not prosecuted for their faiths per se, but for advocating and spreading their 'illicit faiths' and belonging to 'illegal' sects. Whether they actually did so did not concern the secret police. Evidence, if absent, was fabricated. Most Soviet believers prosecuted for their convictions were therefore indicted according to two articles in the Criminal Code that was in force in 1952:

54-10. Propaganda or agitation, containing a call for the overthrow, subversion or weakening of the Soviet government or for the committing of other counter-revolutionary crimes (Articles 54-2–54-9),⁷² and likewise the distribution or preparation or possession of literature of this kind shall be punishable by deprivation of liberty for a term no less than six months.

The same actions during mass disturbances or with the use of religious or national prejudices of the masses or in a war situation or in areas declared to be in a war situation, shall be punishable by measures of social defence, indicated in Article 54-2.⁷³

54-11. Any kind of organized activity, directed towards the preparation or committing of the crimes stipulated in the chapter,⁷⁴ and likewise participation in an organization, formed for the preparation or committing of one of the crimes stipulated in this chapter, shall be punishable by measures of social defence, indicated in the corresponding articles of this chapter.⁷⁵

⁷² These included 'crimes against the state' such as espionage, terrorism, armed uprising, economic 'wrecking,' revelation of state secrets, and association with foreign countries and their representatives for counter-revolutionary purposes.

⁷³ The highest measure of punishment (execution) or declaration to be an enemy of workers with the confiscation of property, the deprivation of Soviet citizenship and permanent banishment abroad, with the proviso that under attenuating circumstances a deprivation of liberty for a term of no less than three years with the confiscation of all or part of one's property can be applied.

⁷⁴ They refer to 'crimes against the state.'

⁷⁵ *Ugolovnyi kodeks Ukrainskoi SSR. Ofitsial'nyi tekst s izmeneniami na 10 okt. 1954 g. i s prilozheniem postateino-sistematisirovannykh materialov* (Moscow, 1954), 20–1. Other Soviet republics had almost identical articles in their criminal codes. In Russia's code, these two articles corresponded to 58-10 and 58-11 respectively.

These two articles were applied to the fourteen Adventists arrested in 1952 in Bila Tserkva.

Ironically, at the time of the trial in 1952 which took place against the backdrop of the Cold War, the Soviet government had been promoting a peace campaign abroad in order to contrast its ‘peace-loving’ stance with the alleged American belligerence. The Soviet government mobilized compliant religious organizations (especially the Orthodox Church) inside and outside the Soviet Union for this purpose. The Soviet government thus staged a trial of pacifists to criminalize them at the same time as it extolled peace.

Bila Tserkva in Ukraine

It is difficult to speak of a representative city or region when it comes to a country as big and complex as the Soviet Union. Certainly, the Ukraine of 1952 was not representative of the Soviet Union of 1952. While much of the Soviet Union escaped occupation during the Second World War, Ukraine did not. Ukraine endured unimaginable levels of destruction and violence, yet it also enjoyed freedom from the Soviet government. In the post-war years, religious activity was much more open, stronger, and diverse in Ukraine than in Russia. In 1947, there were 13,813 Orthodox churches and monasteries in the country, of which 8815 or 63 per cent were situated in Ukraine.⁷⁶ Ukraine became the centre of the Soviet Union’s ‘Bible Belt’.⁷⁷ Likewise, approximately 40 per cent of Protestant churches of the country operated in Ukraine.⁷⁸ No data are readily available on the Adventists. In 1926, however, there were 12,697 Adventists in the country, of whom 4876 or 38.4 per cent lived in Ukraine.⁷⁹ Considering that Ukraine accounted for less than 20 per cent of the population of the Soviet Union, these data indicate that Ukraine was a hotbed of religious activity.

Historically, Ukraine, a borderland as the name implies, harboured many non-Orthodox Christian religions. Catholics and Protestants as

⁷⁶‘Religioznye organizatsii v SSSR v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny (1943–1945 gg.)’, 44.

⁷⁷William Fletscher, “The Soviet Bible Belt: World War II’s Effects on Religion,” in Susan J. Linz, ed., *The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union* (New York, 1985), 101.

⁷⁸Voinalovych, *Partiino-derzhavna polityka*, 11.

⁷⁹Iz istorii Tserkvi adventistov, 78.



Figure 2.1: The Church of St. John the Baptist (2007), a magnificent white church in the centre of Bila Tserkva. Not the old, original white church, it is a restored Catholic church built in 1812 which had been defunct during the Soviet period.

well as the Old Believers from the seventeenth-century Schism of the Orthodox Church sought refuge and asylum in this borderland. When the northern Black Sea coastal area was taken from the Ottomans in the eighteenth century, the vast steppe land was opened up for large-scale colonization, attracting Russians, Ukrainians, and many others (including foreigners such as Germans), who, in turn, brought to the borderland their heterogeneous beliefs. Radical Protestant sects were thus particularly strong in Ukraine and southern Russia.⁸⁰ When the Reformist Adventist movement of pacifists reached the Russian Empire during the First World War, it was particularly popular in Ukraine.⁸¹

Bila Tserkva, where the 1952 trial of the fourteen Adventists took place, was not a large city. Although today it has a population of ap-

⁸⁰See Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation*.

⁸¹Heinz, 40.

proximately 200,000, in 1926 it had 39,000, in 1939 47,000, and in 1959 71,000.⁸² The city of Bila Tserkva and its surrounding Bila Tserkva District in Kiev Oblast' are located in the centre of Ukraine. Kiev, the capital of today's independent Ukraine, was also the capital of the ancient state Rus' to which Bila Tserkva belonged. The foundation of Bila Tserkva dates back to 1032, when the Kiev prince Yaroslav the Wise (Mudryi) built a city on the river Ros', approximately 80 kilometres to the south of Kiev. The city was variably called Iur'iev, Georgev, Giurgev, Iugrev, or Iurev, after Mudryi's Christian name Iurii (Georgii). In 1050 Mudryi built a church in the city which its residents called a white church (*bila tserkva*). After devastation by the Tatars in the thirteenth century and the successful battle of Western Rus' forces against the Tatars in 1311, the city began reconstruction. It came to be called Bila Tserkva (literally White Church) after the ancient church: the first mention of the name dates back to 1331.⁸³

Like many East European cities, Bila Tserkva has a checkered history of various political, social, cultural, and religious influences. When the western regions of the former Rus' land were absorbed into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the fourteenth century (and into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the sixteenth century), Bila Tserkva, too, came under Lithuanian and Polish-Lithuanian rule. During the famous rebellion against the Commonwealth by the Cossack Hetman Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi, the Bila Tserkva regiment consisted of 3000 Cossack fighters.⁸⁴ After the 1667 Andrusovo Treaty between Muscovy and Poland, Bila Tserkva remained under Polish control while Kiev fell into Muscovite hands. Between 1672 (when Poland lost the Podillia region, including Bila Tserkva) and 1699 (when Poland regained it) Bila Tserkva lived under Ottoman rule. When Poland was wiped out of existence by the Third Partition of 1795, Bila Tserkva fell under Russian control.

In Bila Tserkva, Russia's influence remained constant for the next 200 years with only a few interruptions. During the civil war of 1918–20, Bila Tserkva briefly became the centre of Ukrainian national forces organized around the Directorate (Ukrainian National Republic). Like Kiev, Bila

⁸² Volodymyr Kubijović, ed., *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, vol. 1 (Toronto, 1984), 223.

⁸³ *Istoriia mist i sil Ukrainskoi SSR: Kyivs'ka oblast'* (Kiev, 1971), 99–100.

⁸⁴ Serhii Kovalenko and Ol'ha Puhach, *Opys kozats'koi Ukrayiny 1649 roku* (Kiev, 2004),

Tserkva changed hands frequently among Reds (Russian and Ukrainian Bolsheviks), Whites (anti-Bolshevik Russians who regarded Ukraine as an integral part of Russia), Ukrainian fighters (rallied around the blue and yellow national flag), and Polish forces (whose national flag was red and white). During the Second World War, Bila Tserkva was occupied by German forces from July 1942 and January 1944. Here, as elsewhere in Ukraine, most of the Jews were massacred by the occupiers.

Apart from these interruptions, Russia ruled this part of Ukraine for 200 years. Much of Ukraine, including Bila Tserkva, was Russified, so much so that some of the defendants of the 1952 trial, as will be discussed, referred to their land as 'Russia.' Although all the defendants were ethnic Ukrainians of peasant origin and almost certainly their mother tongue was Ukrainian, they all spoke Russian (as the lingua franca of the country) and the trial itself was conducted in the Russian language.

In 1952, when the trial of Reformed Adventists took place in Bila Tserkva, Ukraine was still politically insecure.⁸⁵ The armed fight by Ukrainian nationalists in Western Ukraine had largely been extinguished by brutal Soviet campaigns. Still, the incorporation of Eastern Galicia in Western Ukraine, an area that had never been part of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union, had brought with it heterogeneous political, social, cultural, and religious elements to the Soviet Union. They proved to be de-stabilizing factors. In 1945 Stalin intimated that he 'felt his position in the Ukraine was difficult and insecure.'⁸⁶ Things had not changed very much by 1952.

It was within this political context that the fourteen Adventists were put on trial in the Ukrainian city of Bila Tserkva.

Immediately after the arrests of the Adventists, the police began to interrogate the accused to build what appeared to be an air-tight case against an 'anti-Soviet organization.' They almost succeeded.

⁸⁵ Moscow's attempts at controlling Ukraine in historical and ideological spheres in the post-war years are analysed Serhy Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination* (Toronto, 2004).

⁸⁶ Quoted in Edward R. Stettinius Jr., *Roosevelt and the Russians: The Yalta Conference* (New York, 1949), 187.

3 Interrogations (I)

It's my job to flog, so flog I will.

Franz Kafka¹

THE INTERROGATION of the arrested was central to all Soviet investigations into political crime, not, however, in order to verify the evidence. In the vast majority of cases there was in fact no evidence. Interrogations were used (and needed) to extract confessions of guilt.² Torture was routine. In the 1930s the arrested were sentenced (often to death), without a formal trial, by the secret police's extrajudiciary boards. After the war, however, those suspected of political crimes enjoyed formal trials by judiciary bodies, although with no assurance of justice.

Unfortunately, there are almost no data on the secret police interrogators and prosecutors. Most of the low-rank officials involved in the investigation and interrogation of this sort of case were almost certainly of very modest backgrounds. Most were young sons of peasants and workers. Yet their life trajectory took a very different path from that of their parents. They made a conscious decision to break with the old, faith-filled world. They received a better education. This is not surprising. Some children of those arrested in Bila Tserkva in 1952 (Fedorchuk's son Aleksandr [see p. 92] and Babenko's son Ignat [see p. 120], for example) made a similar decision and willingly accepted the promise of a bright future, not in the other world but in this world, proffered by the Soviet government. It is likely that the interrogators looked down on the arrested believers with utmost contempt. It is even possible that they considered that the believers, *ipso facto*, were enemies of the Soviet government. Whether the arrested actually committed crimes was not as important as their faith in divine law. It was their faith that was put on trial.

¹ *Der Prozeß*, comp. Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt, 1990), 112.

² This practice is sometimes puzzling, because the police often prosecuted the accused without any confession, as was the case with Vasili Belokon' who refused to speak (as discussed in this chapter).

There is no evidence in the case file that the arrested were allowed to access defence lawyers of any kind after their arrest. Defence counsels (*advokaty*) would come onto the scene just before the trial was to begin. Even then, they did not (and perhaps could not) present a forthright defence. Although it is possible that the police simply did not keep records of contact between defendants and legal counsels, judging by the practice of the time, the arrested appeared to receive no legal counsel.

As was customary, interrogations began immediately after arrests. The arrested were asked for their personal information (their names, birthdays, occupations, addresses, families, criminal histories, and the like). Sometimes, the arrested also told their life histories. (Such histories are often very revealing of the events of the Stalin era – the collectivization of the countryside, the Great Famine, the Great Terror, the Second World War, and the like). Normally the first interrogations ended then, with both the interrogators and the interrogated signing the protocols ('questionnaires of the arrested').

Then followed more substantive interrogations. The interrogators wanted evidence of the organized nature of whatever association existed among the arrested Adventists. For this purpose, they extracted confessions that the accused had secretly held prayer meetings in private homes. (Such meetings were illegal at the time.) The interrogators also needed evidence of religious propaganda and agitation aimed against the Soviet government. To this end, they coerced admissions that the accused had advocated disobedience to Soviet laws on universal military service in observance of divine law ('Thou shalt not kill'). The interrogators used visits to private homes and the distribution of religious literature as additional evidence of crime (the proselytism of an illegal faith).

The confessions of the accused may appear to the unwary reader to be credible, for superficially they are in conformity with the teaching of Reformed Adventism. Yet a perusal of interrogation records reveals subtle signs of forced confessions even when the accused appear to have willingly incriminated themselves and others.

Below the interrogation records of the arrested individuals will be examined in the order in which they appear in the case file.

Vasilii Belokon' ♦³

The Case of Belokon's turned out to be extraordinary. When he was first interrogated on 26 November 1952 he refused to sign the protocol 'on grounds of his religious beliefs.' Consequently the protocol has no signature by Belokon' (1:9). (His arrest warrant was issued the day after, on 27 November. He refused to acknowledge the warrant by refusing to sign it) (1:7v). A more serious interrogation followed at 17:30 on 26 November:

Q: Are you a believer?

A: Yes, I am a believer.

Q: Of what creed?

A: In 1918 in the village of Mohylivka, Zhmerynka District, Vinnytsia Oblast' I was baptized, and from then on I was a member of the Seventh-Day Adventist community.

Q: When did you become a member of the illegal, anti-Soviet sectarian organization of 'Reformed Adventists'?

A: In 1932, while living in the village of Mohylivka, Zhmerynka District, Vinnytsia Oblast', I heard from my fellow Adventists that the Congress of Seventh-Day Adventists had adopted a resolution which permitted the Adventists to serve in the Soviet Army and bear arms in defence of the Soviet state and also permitted the members to work on Saturdays. I disagreed with the decision, because it contradicted the Fourth and Sixth Commandments of Christ. Because of this, in 1932 I joined the Reformed Adventists. To this day I am a Reformed Adventist.

Q: Name those who you know were members of the anti-Soviet sectarian organization of Reformed Adventists living in Kiev and Vinnytsia Oblast's.

Belokon's response to this last question was complete silence. Apparently he could not bring himself to betray his fellow believers. The interrogator from the secret police, Vetoshkin, and assistant prosecutor of Kiev Oblast'

³Here and hereafter the 'black diamond' sign indicates that the defendant subsequently challenged his or her own 'confessions' and the verdict of the court. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 should be read with this fact in mind.

V. Rusetskii, noted that Belokon' refused to answer this and other questions. He also refused to sign the present interrogation record. Vetoshkin and Rusetskii signed the record, however. The interrogation ended at midnight (1:12–13). This was all that they could extract from Belokon' in *six and a half hours* of interrogation (1:12v).

One should not take this record at face value, however: Belokon' did not sign it and the record is possibly a fabrication. Subsequently, this issue will have significant implications for Belokon's role in the case: he may well have been a police agent (see p. 164).

At some point on 26 November, either before, during, or after this interrogation, Belokon' was faced with some of those arrested in the case whose confessions implicated him: Darovskii, Borzak, and Gavriliuk. When asked whether he knew these individuals seated before him who had identified him as Vasilii Fedorovich Belokon', he adamantly refused to answer the question (1:59, 1:192, 2:67).

The following day, 27 November, Belokon' was interrogated again. The session began at 11:00. On this occasion the interrogation was conducted by four people: unable to get Belokon' to speak, Vetoshkin and Rusetskii apparently turned to Khor'kov and Subbotin (both secret police officers named earlier) for assistance. When they demanded that he 'testify about your anti-Soviet sectarian activity as a Reformed Adventist in the cities of Kiev and Bila Tserkva', Belokon' refused to say a word. The session lasted *six hours*, until 17:00. One can almost feel the frustration of the interrogators from the very terseness of the records. All the same, the four men could not extract so much as a word from Belokon'. (Later the four reported that Belokon' said only, 'I have no word for you.' He would not explain why he refused to speak.) They noted, 'The accused Belokon' refused to speak, to answer the questions by the interrogators, and also to sign the present protocol.' They read their report to this effect to Belokon', signed the protocol, and ended the session (1:14–15, 20r).

The next record available dates from 28 November. This is not to say that Belokon' was not interrogated further after the previous day's session ended at 17:00. It is very likely that there were more interrogations and more threats throughout the night and beyond. In any case, the records of 28 November are even shorter than those of the preceding day. This time only Vetoshkin and Rusetskii were present. They posed the following question: 'You are accused according to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist

Republic Criminal Code, Article 50–10, part 2 and Article 11 [conducting anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation and belonging to an anti-Soviet organization, respectively]. Do you understand what you are accused of? Do you plead guilty to these accusations?’ Belokon’ refused to speak and, moreover, refused to sign the interrogation protocol. The two officers read the almost empty protocol to Belokon, signed it, and ended the session. The session had lasted two hours from 14:00 to 16:00 (1:19).

These police records alone fail to convey the intense battle of wills that must have taken place between Belokon’ and his interrogators. Belokon’ was clearly treated extremely harshly. It would have been rare for the secret police interrogators to give any ground, but in this case the interrogation was terminated rather quickly.

In any case, self-incriminating confessions had never been a necessary condition for conviction in Soviet criminal justice. Moreover, according to his interrogators, Belokon’s very defiance and his silence spoke eloquently of his guilt. It would have been better to obtain his confessions, but the police did not need them. They had accumulated enough material against him from those arrested before him.

Polina Gavriliuk

Polina Gavriliuk was one of them. Her interrogations began the day after she was arrested. The prosecutor Rusetskii and the secret police officer Vetroshkin were in charge.

Q: When did you join the anti-Soviet illegal sectarian organization of Reformed Adventists?

A: In 1947 in the city of Bila Tserkva I was baptized. From then on I was a member of the Seventh-Day Adventist community. As a member of the Adventist community in Bila Tserkva, I visited its chapel, where I got acquainted with the Word of God and the Law of God. Later I came to understand that there was a deception in the community: its presbyters [ministers and church elders] and preachers were *reconciling the believers to the laws of the Soviet government*. By doing so they deviated from divine law. As a result, I left the Seventh-Day Adventist community and in 1949 joined the secret sectarian organization of Reformed Adventists

working in the city of Bila Tserkva and the villages of Bila Tserkva and Velykopopolovets'ke Districts of Kiev Oblast'.

Q: What deviations did you oppose?

A: The Seventh-Day Adventist community claims that believers are obligated to obey the laws of the Soviet government regarding universal military duties, and to serve in the Soviet Army and to defend the Soviet Union with arms in hand on the same basis as everyone else. *I could not possibly agree with this, because this is a deviation from God's law.* Following Christ's Sixth Commandment 'Thou shalt not kill,' I consider all people my brethren and *not my enemies*, so I can not bear arms to defend the Soviet Union.

Q: In the event of an attack?

A: Even in the event of an attack by foreign powers against the Soviet Union, I could not bear arms to defend the Soviet Union. *Not only can I not defend the Soviet Union from armed attacks,* neither in peace time nor in war time could I work at military factories inasmuch as they produce weapons there. (1:28–30)

Gavriliuk's statements appear principled. They complied with the positions of the Reformed Adventists. Someone, probably a prosecutor, underlined those phrases (indicated by italics in the text quoted here and hereafter) that he considered particularly incriminating. The interrogators sought to ensure that Gavriliuk appeared as an enemy of the Soviet Union. In fact, her answers reveal some subtlety:

Q: Do you recognize the Soviet government as legitimate?

A: *I recognize God's authority as legitimate. I recognize the Soviet government within the limits of my faith, and obey only those Soviet laws that do not go against divine law.* (1:31)

According to extant records, the interrogators did not further pursue her on this issue. Perhaps her subtle answer escaped them, for whom the answer was plain enough.

Instead, they went after other members of the community. Unlike Belokon' Gavriliuk did not hesitate:

Q: Name all members of the illegal, anti-Soviet organization of Reformed Adventist you know.

A: I know among the members of the secret sectarian organization of Reformed Adventists: in the city of Bila Tserkva – (1) Praskov'ia Ivanovna Glivaskaia, (2) Sekletina Ivanovna Glivaskaia, (3) Petr Ivanovich Pilipenko, (4) Liuba Fedorchuk (whose patronymic I don't know), (5) Aleksei Saranchuk, (6) Praskov'ia Saranchuk, (7) Aleksei Matiuchenko, (8) Antonina Matiuchenko, (9) Liuba Fedorchuk [probably named twice], (9a) Arkhip Brovchenko, (10) Vasilii Arkhipovich Brovchenko, (11) Ol'ga Koroza, (12) Tat'iana Kravets, (13) Artem Bridnia, his son (14) Aleksei Bridnia, (15) Mariia Bridnia, and also Vasilisa, whose surname I have forgotten, but she lives on Red Army Street in Bila Tserkva; in the village of Popravka – (16) Ivan Terent'evich Babenko, (17) Sergei Borzak; (III) in the village of Matiushi – (18) Gania Shuliak (I don't know her patronymic); and in the village of Shamraivka, Velykopolovets'ke District, someone called Katia whose surname I don't recall, but she is elderly, and limps on her right leg. I need to add that we haven't been to see Artem Bridnia recently, because he quarrelled with his wife Mariia and he kicked her out of his house. He broke divine commandments in that way. (1:31–2)

Having collected names, the interrogators now sought to identify who were the most active:

Q: In whose house did illegal meetings of members of the Reformed Adventist sectarian organization take place?

A: We had clandestine meetings of Reformed Adventists in the house of Praskov'ia Glivaskaia and her sister Sekletina, in the home of Aleksei Saranchuk and also in the home of Ivan Babenko in Popravka.

Q: To what villages did you go and with whom for these meetings?

A: In 1949–52 I repeatedly went to meetings in Popravka, Matiushi, and Shamraivka with Fedorchuk. I last went to Shamraivka this past Saturday, 15 November 1952, with Fedorchuk. There we prayed in the home of Katia. I last went to Matiushi in 1951 with Fedorchuk and the Glivaskaia sisters – Praskov'ia and Sekletina. There we had meetings in the [former] house of Praskov'ia Glivaskaia (she now lives in

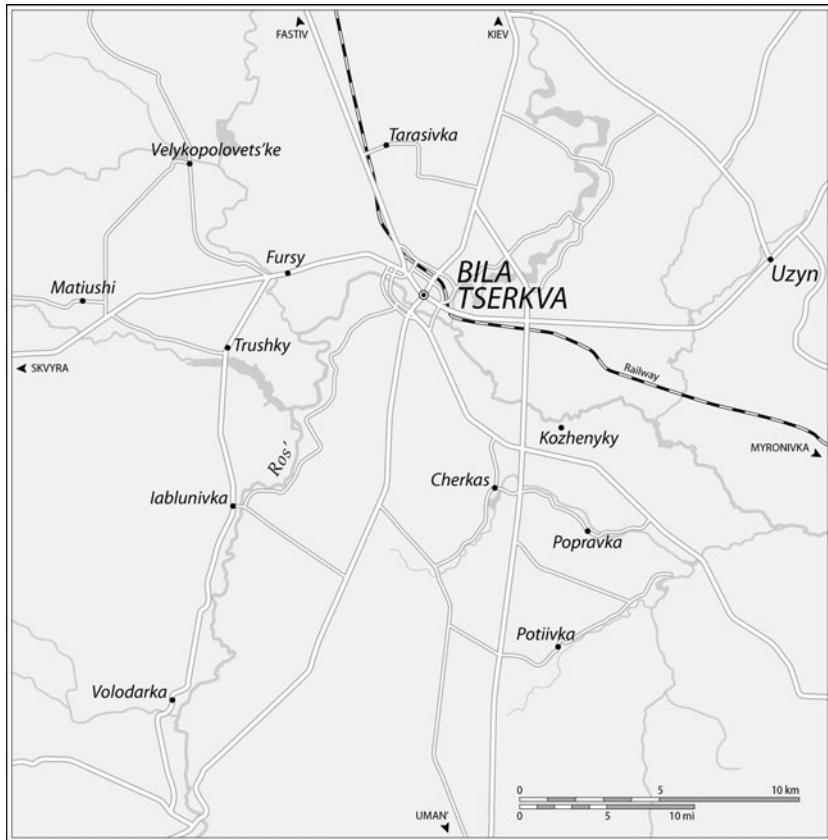


Figure 3.1: Bila Tserkva and its surrounding villages

Bila Tserkva, but she had a house there before) in which Gania Shuliak took part. (1:33–4)

Having extracted much useful information, the interrogators seemed to have allowed Gavriliuk a three-day break.

At the next session, on 21 November, they mainly asked for her personal history. According to her account, having lost in 1933 her parents and her little brother (who was only four years at the time), she was raised in a collective-farm orphanage in the village of Limeshchikha. She studied for five years, and then worked for six months as a cleaner at a factory. In 1937 she moved to the city of Bila Tserkva, where for a year she worked as

a housemaid in the home of a military man. (He may have been arrested in the Great Terror of 1937–8, and if so she lost her job then.) From 1938 to June 1941, when war broke out, she worked as a cleaner and a laundress at the infantry school in Bila Tserkva. The war forced her to return to Limeshchikha. In April 1942 she was taken to Magdeburg, Germany, where she worked on the private farm of a cigarette factory. At the end of May 1945, when the war ended, she was sent to various camps in Germany. She went through the registration process for Soviet citizens and returned to Ukraine in August 1945. After living with her grandfather that winter, she returned to the city of Bila Tserkva in the spring of 1946. She worked in the mess of a military camp, in the village of Trushky near the city. In the spring of 1947, she went to a meeting of Adventists in the city. She then joined the Adventist community, and lost her job because she did not want to work on Saturdays. After working at a factory for a year, she was fired in the end for the same reason. From 1949 to 1952 she worked only seasonally for the farm ‘Agrolespitomnik.’ In the meantime, the Adventist community had split in 1948. A ‘presbyter’ from Kiev named Iakovenko told the community that the members could serve in the Soviet Army and bear arms. The presbyter’s position was rejected by many members, who then left the community (1:35v–7).

Two days later, another session of interrogation was held from 11:00 to 15:30. The interrogators pressed Gavriliuk for more names of Reformed Adventists, insisting that she had not named all whom she knew. Gavriliuk complied, albeit with difficulty, apparently because she had already named everyone she knew. She named one person: Ivan Ocheretnyi, an agronomist at the farm ‘Agrolespitomnik’ and 25 to 27 years of age, lived with Aleksei Saranchuk. But she added that Ocheretnyi had not attended the meetings of Reformed Adventists. Still, Gavriliuk explained, he must be a Reformed Adventist, because he came to know Galia Shpunder (living in Fursy, 8 to 10 kilometres from the city of Bila Tserkva) and married her and moved there in 1951. The reason for her speculation was shaky at best: Galia had a sister named Anna (or Hanna), 27 years of age, who was a Reformed Adventist in Fursy. The Reformed Adventists, Gavriliuk noted, had a law: ‘Marry only within the congregation.’ Gavriliuk was unable to name anyone else (1:39–41).

Subsequently, the interrogators changed their tactics, pressing her to state who else was expelled ('disfellowshipped') from the Seventh-Day

Adventist community. Gavriliuk named six: Liubov' Fedorchuk, Vasilisa Lykova, approximately 40 years of age, Tat'iana Kravets, also about 40 and living on Red Army Street, across the street from the Seventh-Day Adventist meeting place, Petr Pilipenko, about 54, Stepan Kolesnichenko, 43, and his wife Tat'iana Kolesnichenko, 40, living on Dachna Street in Bila Tserkva (1:41–2).

The interrogators then had Gavriliuk confirm and clarify her earlier statements on her religious convictions. Gavriliuk complied, according to the case file: ‘I won’t bear arms and I recommend that others do not,’ adding that she considered the Saturday Sabbath ‘divine will’ (1:43). Asked whether her refusal to work on Saturdays violated the Soviet law designating Sundays the universal day off, Gavriliuk noted: ‘I haven’t worked on Saturdays and will not. That [working on Saturday] would violate my religious convictions. Therefore I can not work in an office or factory where it’s necessary to work on Saturdays’ (1:44). If Gavriliuk was a sincere and devout believer, everything in her statements makes perfect sense. Her reason for not having regular employment – her refusal to work on Saturdays – is logical and clear. Judging by the case file, she did not say that she regarded the Soviet government as the enemy, but simply that she considered divine law to be above Soviet laws. Unlike Belokon’, she did not shrink from naming other believers and willingly ‘betrayed’ her co-religionists. Quite possibly, she did not consider this a ‘betrayal,’ because she accepted Soviet rule so long as it did not interfere with her spiritual life. She declared that she had no enemies on earth. Therefore, everyone, perhaps including her interrogators, were her brethren. She saw no reason to hide the truth from the Soviet government.

The interrogators sought to portray Gavriliuk as an ardent advocate of the illicit religious movement. They asked her where she travelled to proselytize for Reformed Adventism. She willingly responded: from 1949 she had visited both by herself and with Liubov' Fedorchuk the villages of Popravka, Matiushi, and Shamraivka in order to spread the teachings of Reformed Adventism (1:44–5).

The following day, 24 November a decision to indict Gavriliuk was written up and signed by Khor’kov, Zashchitin, and Zavrik, another secret police officer. The indictment, charging Gavriliuk with spreading anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation and belonging to an anti-Soviet organization (1:46–8), was presented to her. Asked whether she understood

the accusations, she responded in the affirmative and pleaded guilty. Then she stated:

As a believer I strive for an eternal afterlife, which according to the ‘teaching’ of Reformed Adventism is possible to receive by closely following the commandments of Christ. Observing these commandments, I regard the earthly as ephemeral and acknowledge as legitimate only the authority of God, the observation of whose laws I deem necessary in the first place.

I recognize the Soviet government as an earthly, temporary power and obey its laws only insofar as they do not go against my convictions and prevent me from obeying the commandments of God . . . I have never denounced my conduct even though I’ve known that it ran counter to existing Soviet laws . . . In order to consolidate our beliefs we periodically gathered to pray. (1:50–2)

On the face of it, the police case appeared as strong and tight as it could be by the standards of the time: the defendant confessed to the ‘crimes’; there was ‘material evidence’ (such as religious literature); there were also ‘facts’ (such as her refusing to work on Saturdays).

After Stalin’s death, however, the procuracy in Kiev claimed that all the defendants had pleaded *not* guilty in their pre-trial investigations (see p. 179). So the guilty pleas of Gavriliuk and others should not be taken at face value.

Using the Gavriliuk confessions, the interrogators sought to nail the ringleader of the group, Belokon’. Gavriliuk was again interrogated on 26 November for seven hours, from 17:00 to 24:00. The interrogation record was signed by Rusetskii, Khor’kov, and Vetoshkin. Belokon’ was interrogated on the same day at the same time (from 17:30 to 24:00) and the protocol was signed by Rusetskii and Vetoshkin. This meant that Khor’kov was mainly in charge of Gavriliuk and Rusetskii and Vetoshkin went back and forth between Gavriliuk’s and Belokon’s interrogations. Asked about Belokon’, Gavriliuk answered that she had known him since the spring of 1950, when he conducted a meeting in the house of Praskov’ia Glivaskaia. She added, however, ‘No anti-Soviet conversations took place.’ Apparently unsatisfied, the interrogators pressed her to discuss Belokon’s anti-Soviet sectarian activity. She said:

About Vasili Belokon’ and his son Sergei Belokon’ I know this: they are active members of the sect of Reformed Adventists out-

lawed in the Soviet Union. I did not converse with them on political themes. Their participation in the anti-Soviet sect of Reformed Adventists is evidence of their attitude towards the Soviet government. The Belokon's also spoke against working on Saturdays, serving in the Soviet Army, and killing enemies of the Soviet government. They didn't acknowledge the Seventh-Day Adventist congregation recognized by the Soviet government and instead attended secret meetings of Reformed Adventists.

Gavriliuk insisted, however, that she was not very familiar with them, because she had met Vasilii only once in the spring of 1950 and Sergei in the summer of 1951 (also at the house of Proskov'ia Glivaskaia).

Her answers still did not satisfy the interrogators. Pressed further, she admitted that she had seen Vasilii Belokon' earlier when Praskov'ia was building her house and then saw him again at illegal meetings (1:60–4). Obviously she was under strong pressure to implicate Vasilii Belokon' explicitly in anti-Soviet activity, but this she would not do. This fact probably explains the length of this interrogation session: seven hours.

One should note that only a few pages of records were taken for a seven-hour session. More cases will follow in which a long session produced only a meagre record. This is a telltale sign that the accused resisted for a long time and that intimidation and threat were applied to extract necessary confessions.

At midnight, Khor'kov, Vetoshkin, and Rusetskii put Gavriliuk and Vasilii Belokon' face to face. Gavriliuk was asked to identify Belokon', whom she acknowledged as having conducted a meeting of Reformed Adventists at Glivaskaia's house in the spring of 1950. As noted earlier, Belokon' refused to answer whether he knew Gavriliuk and whether he would confirm her testimony (1:58–9).

Gavriliuk was not let off the hook yet. On the afternoon of 27 November, from 15:30 to 16:10, she was interrogated again about the notebooks seized from Pilipenko and Fedorchuk. Gavriliuk readily admitted that she copied writings of the Adventism founder William Miller for Pilipenko and Fedorchuk. She added that she copied Miller's writing for others as well, but noted that those notebooks belonged to everyone: she and her co-believers considered them everyone's property (1:54–5).

The interrogators were impatient to bring the case to a conclusion. The following day, from 9:00 to 10:00, they questioned Gavriliuk about

the religious notebooks just discussed and enquired where she had found the original books from which she copied. She replied that she had received the book, *The Battle and Its Reason*, from Aleksei Saranchuk of Bila Tserkva (whom she mentioned earlier as a Reformed Adventist) and read its synopses to her brethren at village meetings (1:56–7). This concluded the interrogations of Gavriliuk.

Petr Pilipenko ♦

Like the records of Gavriliuk's, Petr Pilipenko's interrogation records reveal much about him and his time. Interrogated from 10:00 to 12:00 the day after he was arrested by Vetoshkin, Pilipenko recounted his life history briefly. Until 1932 he had worked on his own meagre land. He then left for Novorzhev, Russia, just north of the Belarus-Russian border. There he worked at a milk factory. (He did not say why he abandoned his village in 1932, but it seems obvious that the Great Famine forced him to.) After a year he moved farther north to Leningrad where he worked first as a carpenter at a streetcar factory, then at a meteorological station. In June 1941 he was mobilized by the Red Army and sent to the front. He worked in the ‘economic platoon’ (which looked after catering, laundry, and other maintenance work) of the Fourth Rifle Regiment. In September 1941 he was wounded and taken prisoner by German forces, which took him to Dvinsk (Daugavpils), Latvia. From there he was despatched to Germany. Liberated in the spring of 1945 by the Red Army, he worked in its Sanitary Regiment until the summer of 1945, when he returned to his previous work at the meteorological station in Leningrad. In 1947 he returned to live in the city of Bila Tserkva. (He did not say what he did in the city.) He did not work at all after 1951, when he was 53 (1:73–4).

The following day, Pilipenko was questioned on more substantive issues by Vetoshkin and Rusetskii:

Q: Are you a believer?

A: Yes, I am.

Q: Of what creed?

A: I'm a member of a secret community of Reformed Adventists.

Q: From when?

A: I was brought up from childhood by my parents on the spirit of teaching by the Seventh-Day Adventists. As an adult, I was baptized *in 1923*. Since then I've been a member of the Seventh-Day Adventist congregation, operating then in the village of Popravka, Bila Tserkva District, Kiev Oblast'. (1:76)

Subsequently, Pilipenko stated that he had disagreed with the decision of the 1928 congress of Adventists that obliged them to serve in the Red Army. So he left and joined the ranks of Reformed Adventists. He did not say when he joined the Reformed Adventists. If he did at all, he probably joined in 1948, when, along with Gavriliuk (according to her), he was disfellowshipped by the Seventh-Day Adventist sect.

Asked why he disagreed with the congress decision, he answered: 'Obeying the Law of God, I consider that all the people on earth are my brethren and there should not be enemies. Therefore I cannot kill anyone at any time, even when the Soviet Union is attacked by its enemies' (1:77).

Earlier Gavriliuk and here Pilipenko used the expression 'enemies of the Soviet Union,' even though they insisted that there were no enemies on earth for them. Does this suggest that these words were not theirs but the interrogators'? It is quite likely. The interrogators paid little attention to detail, because they were so convinced that these believers were unmitigated 'enemies' of the Soviet government.

The police pressed Pilipenko further:

Q: Do you consider the Soviet Union your homeland?

A: Yes, I consider the Soviet Union my homeland.

Q: But in the event of an attack would you defend the Soviet government with arms in hand?

A: No, I wouldn't. As I've said, I have no personal enemies on this earth and all people are my brethren, and therefore I cannot kill anyone. (1:78)

He admitted that he attended meetings of Reformed Adventists at Pras'kov'ia Glivaskaia's and Ivan Babenko's homes. Asked whether he wished to add to his 'confessions,' he did: 'I will strictly follow divine law in the future, too, and as a Reformed Adventist I'll never renounce my religious convictions' (1:78–9).

The following day, 19 November, Pilipenko was subjected to yet more interrogations from 20:00 to 23:45. The interrogator Vетoshkin

was curious about Pilipenko's military service during the Second World War. He asked whether that did not contradict his conscience. Pilipenko explained that when he was sent to the rifle regiment, he had declared directly to his commander that he could not serve in the line of fire, because of his religious convictions. The commander therefore sent him to the transport battalion. (Clearly, even at a time when the threat of terror was ever present, there were commanders with a conscience.) Vetoshkin then asked whether he held a rifle in his hand in the transport battalion. Pilipenko answered, 'Yes, I held a military rifle and armed myself in the battalion.' Vetoshkin then enquired whether he had engaged 'enemies' directly. Pilipenko said, 'No.' He had not fired a single bullet from the rifle he carried. Vetoshkin: 'Why?' Pilipenko: 'Working in the transport battalion I had not a single occasion on which I had to shoot Germans.' He added that even if he had fallen into such a situation, he would not have fired:

Although the Germans had attacked the Soviet Union in 1941 and occupied part of our territory and I understood that at the front I'd have to shoot German occupiers, I categorically refused to do so, because obeying divine law, I didn't consider the German occupiers my personal enemies at the time, thus the Law of God forbade me from shooting at them. (1:82)

Four days later, on 23 November, Pilipenko was interrogated by Vetoshkin again. He again admitted having attended meetings of Reformed Adventists. Vetoshkin suspected that his wife, Mariia, too, was a Reformed Adventist. Pilipenko, however, denied the allegation: although he had tried to convert her to the faith of Reformed Adventism, she refused. On that date, a resolution, signed by Khor'kov and Zashchitin, was made by Vetoshkin to indict Pilipenko on the same charges as Gavriliuk – conducting anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation and belonging to an anti-Soviet organization. Presented with the indictment, according to the case file, Pilipenko pleaded guilty (1:83–5, 86–90). Pilipenko admitted that the notebook with excerpts of religious themes had been copied by Polina Gavriliuk (1:91–2). This ended his pre-trial interrogations.

A cursory reading suggests that Pilipenko's statements are by and large credible: an apparently deeply religious man merely explained his views and opinions to his interrogators who put them on paper. Yet as will become clear at a later stage (when Pilipenko was astounded by the verdict

of the court and appealed for justice), the police in fact took liberty to distort and exaggerate his statements so as to make him appear an inveterate enemy of the Soviet government.

Praskov'ia Glivaskaia and Sekletina Glivaskaia

A perusal of the interrogation records of the Glivaskaia sisters reveals a much less certain case. This is partly because Sekletina was illiterate and could not sign any records or statements. Oddly, whereas at the time of the Great Terror of 1937–8, illiterates normally signed their statements with their thumb prints,⁴ Sekletina and other illiterate defendants in the present case did not do so. There are simply notations by the interrogators that the accused were illiterate. Why they did not insist on the use of thumb prints in lieu of signatures is not known. Perhaps Sekletina adamantly refused to have her finger printed on documents that she could not read. Documents with no signature or thumb print would have had no legal significance even at the time of the Great Terror. (Then, people were terrorized in extrajudiciary fashion.) Therefore, the present case, based in part on unverifiable documents, must have carried a considerable risk for the police and the prosecution. Yet no one, not even the defence counsel who were conspicuous most of the time by their absence, questioned any of this or other loose ends in the police interrogations.

According to interrogation records, the Glivaskaia sisters, like the others, confessed to their illicit faith. Questioned on 18 November, the day after her arrest, by Subbotin, Praskov'ia Glivaskaia appears to have responded straightforwardly. Asked why she had no steady job, she answered:

I indeed have *no permanent job* to speak of. I work *in the autumn for two or three months collecting seeds in the woods, and for the remainder of the year I have no work.*

I could work in an office, but *this won't do, because in government offices and factories Sunday is the rest day, but I celebrate Saturday . . .*

Praskov'ia further stated that in 1926, when she was 16 years old, she joined the sect of 'Subbotniki' ('Saturdayists') in the village of Matiushi and was

⁴This was certainly the case in Ukraine. See Hiroaki Kuromiya, *The Voices of the Dead: Stalin's Great Terror, 1937–1938* (New Haven and London, 2007), 209–13, 230, and 232.

baptized in Rastavitsa River by the presbyter Gulotnik, who was visiting the village at the time. Ever since then she had been a believer and obeyed all the teachings and commandments of God. She insisted that she had no enemies. Subbotin then asked her whether she considered the German occupiers the enemies of the Soviet Union and in particular her enemies. Praskov'ia said that although she did not know what others thought, the German occupiers had done nothing bad to her and she had no reason to regard them as enemies. Praskov'ia, unlike her older sister Sekletina, was literate and signed the records, although her uncertain signature betrays her limited literacy (1:104–6).

Praskov'ia's last statement may reflect the fact that the German occupiers generally treated the believers leniently in hopes that they were actual and potential anti-Soviet forces. Had she not witnessed mass killings by the German forces? And having witnessed them, did she continue to regard the occupiers as her 'brethren' simply because they had done 'nothing bad' to her? This was precisely the point the interrogator Subbotin sought to drive home. Asked whether she would fight the 'capitalist aggressors' if they attacked the Soviet Union, she said, 'I cannot answer that question. In general I have nothing to fight over, because I have no enemies' (1:106).

Pressed by Subbotin, Praskov'ia named her fellow believers: Aleksei Nikiforovich Saranchuk, his wife Praskov'ia, and her own sister Sofia Ivanovna Saenko. She insisted that she knew no one else. She visited the Saranchuks often and conversed with them on various problems of daily life. Yet she never said prayers in their house. She only prayed at home with her sister Sekletina (1:106–7).

On the same day, Praskov'ia was also interrogated by Vetoshkin and Rusetskii. There, a somewhat different tone emerged from her confessions. Now she explicitly said that she was a Reformed Adventist (instead of a 'Subbotnik'). She had disagreed with the decision of the 1928 congress of Seventh-Day Adventists and joined the Reformed Adventists. Asked whether she considered the Soviet Union her motherland, she said, 'Yes.' Then, the interrogator asked her why she would refuse to take up arms in defence of the Soviet government. She responded: '*I consider all people on earth my brethren . . .* Therefore I cannot bear arms and kill anyone even when attacked. All earthly powers I regard as temporary. I can follow only those laws of any earthly power (including the Soviet Union) which don't contravene the law of God, because the believers have to obey not the

Soviet laws but divine law.' She added that she would not work at military factories under any circumstances. For that matter, she would not work at any factory, so long as she had to work on Saturdays (1:108–12).

Vetoshkin and Rusetskii could not break Praskov'ia's will in one important respect: she denied holding secret prayer meetings in her house. Such meetings would have betrayed the organized nature of her faith, evidence of her leading role in an illicit organization. Praskov'ia insisted that even though she visited meetings in the house of 'Fedor Sharaevskii' before she moved to the city of Bela Tserkva in 1949, she had been to no meeting since. The interrogators badgered her: 'You're lying. You held illegal meetings of the sect of Reformed Adventists in your house. Why do you hide it?' Praskov'ia stood her ground: 'No meetings took place in my house in the city of Bila Tserkva. At home I prayed only with my sister' (1:112–13).

On the same day, 18 November, Praskov'ia's sister Sekletina Glivaskaia was interrogated by Zavrik. Sekletina admitted that she had been a member of the sect of 'Seventh-Day Adventists' since the winter of 1948, but not of its legally operating community: she had become an 'Adventist' under the influence of her sister Praskov'ia. She confessed to the same beliefs as her sister: she obeyed the law of God, regarded all earthly powers as ephemeral, and considered all people on earth her brethren: 'We mustn't resist evil, namely, pay evil for evil, because God alone can punish evil. I oppose people taking up arms to fight.' Sekletina admitted that she and her sister prayed at home. Asked who else prayed with them, she named two: Polia (who, according to her, lived with her) and Polia's friend Liuba. No one else came to her house to pray. She did not say who Polia and Liuba were. (They were probably Polina Gavriliuk and Liubov' Fedorchuk.) Zavrik then questioned whether she had any intention to renounce her faith. She merely replied, 'No, I don't' (1:135–40). As noted earlier, she was illiterate and did not sign this and other records of her interrogation. The only signature is that of the interrogator Zavrik.

The following day, 19 November, Zavrik interrogated Sekletina again. This time she changed her story. Although the day before she had said that she joined the sect in 1948, in fact she had joined in the 1930s: until 1934 she was an Orthodox Christian, but her village church closed, and then she joined her sister's sect. She now named many more who she said took part in prayer meetings in her and Praskov'ia's house: Gavriil Belik, Dem'ian

Darovskii, Ksenia Belik, Polina Gavriliuk, Liuba Fedorchuk, and Aleksei Saranchuk (who, according to Sekletina, had ‘gone insane’) (1:141–2).

Having extracted the confession they apparently wanted from Sekletina, the police now questioned her sister Praskov’ia again, on 23 November. This time she retracted her earlier testimonies, admitting that she hid the fact that she had held secret prayer meetings of Reformed Adventists in her house: in 1951 and 1952 she ‘systematically’ held meetings on Saturdays and named all the people her sister had named, adding two more: Praskov’ia Saranchuk (Aleksei Saranchuk’s wife) and Petr Pilipenko (1:114–16). The record of this session consists of only three pages, even though the interrogation lasted for as long as seven and a half hours, from 10:00 to 17:30. It is not difficult to imagine that the police could not break Praskov’ia easily.

The following day, the Glivaskaia sisters were separately presented with an indictment. Both pleaded guilty of conducting anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation and belonging to an anti-Soviet organization. In pleading guilty, Praskov’ia added that she had joined the sect of Reformed Adventists in 1929 because the Soviet government had forced her to work on Saturdays. From 1930 to 1949 prayer meetings were held in the house of Sharaevskii or ‘Chutkovskii’ or someone else whose name she could not recall. She also held meetings of Reformed Adventists in her house in the village of Matiushi during the Second World War and after, until 1949, and, thereafter, in the city of Bila Tserkva, where she moved in 1949. In the meetings they discussed such topics as ‘What is Satan?’ (‘a being who bewitched the humans into disobeying Jesus Christ’s Commandments’). They viewed it as their task to fight against Satan (1:120–3).

Sekletina implicated even more people in her guilty plea on that day: for one, Arkhip Brovchenko, with whom she and her sister had been acquainted from 1935 or 1936 to the day they were all arrested. She added that she and her sister attended prayer meetings in Brovchenko’s house in Trushky where his family (wife Nadezhda, son Vasilii, and daughter Anna) and two elderly men, Iarema and Daniil, were also present. This time, she followed her sister’s suit and named Petr Pilipenko as having attended the meetings in their house. She concluded the 24 November interrogation with this statement: ‘The chief aim of my life is to acquire an eternal afterlife in the heavenly kingdom’ (1:146–50). She gave her

tormentor (whom she did not consider her ‘enemy’) what he wanted: after all, everything earthly was ephemeral to her.

Four days later, on 28 November, the Glivaskaia sisters were interrogated separately about the religious literature seized from their house. Praskov’ia stated that she had acquired it from ‘Panas Azhamka,’ who had attended the meetings in her house in Matiushi, but died in 1949 (1:124–6). Sekletina denied that she possessed works by Ellen G. White (she was unable to read), but the interrogator Subbotin seemed to think that she owned them as sacred objects or a talisman. Sekletina, however, merely said that they were in fact not hers but her sister’s. Unsatisfied, Subbotin accused her anew: she had protected her sectarian comrades from the police by not naming them in the earlier interrogation on 18 November. According to the record of her response (which she did not sign, of course), she readily admitted that she had indeed wanted to hide their participation in the meetings from the police. Asked about her view of defending the motherland from enemies, she said that for her ‘the power of the Lord’ was foremost and if the Soviet government wanted to be protected from someone, ‘let it defend itself’ (1:151–2).

The Glivaskaia sisters thus were made out to be convinced Reformed Adventists.

Sergei Borzak

Like Pilipenko, Borzak appears to have been a long-standing Adventist. Like those of others, his life story, too, provides a fascinating glimpse into the history of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Interrogated on 18 November by secret police official Gutorov and the prosecutor Rusetskii, he stated that he had joined the sect of Seventh-Day Adventists in 1913 in Cherkas, Bila Tserkva District. In 1914 he was sentenced to four years of hard labour for refusing to fulfil his military duties on the grounds of his religious convictions. After his release from prison in 1917, he returned home to the village of Popravka and tilled his own land. In 1926, he took the initiative to organize an agricultural cooperative (*artel’*) with members of the Seventh-Day Adventist community. The cooperative appears to have been disbanded in 1929. Borzak joined the collective farm in his village, where he worked as a stableman until 1933.

Meanwhile, in 1930 he left the sect. He said that he had no choice, because he was forced to work on Saturdays in order to support his nine family members. He lost an unspecified number of his family in the Great Famine of 1932–3. In 1933 Borzak and his family fled the famine and moved to Beshanitsy, near Polovets in Belarus (where the famine was much less severe), where he worked through 1947. For three years he worked as a groom, then as a tailor at a garment cooperative. During the war, he worked as a tailor at another cooperative. When the Germans were driven back, he was taken with them to the city of Sabeia (Sabile?), about 100 kilometres from Riga, Latvia. After the war, he returned to Beshanitsy, where he worked as a tailor. In 1948 he returned to the village of Popravka, where he worked until his arrest in 1952. In 1949 he began to visit the meetings of Seventh-Day Adventists, although he did not join the congregation. From 1930 to 1949, he did not go to any church (1:162–3, 164–5, 172).

It is impossible to know what drew Borzak back to the Adventist Church in 1949. Did his old faith never die? Was he merely curious or nostalgic? Did he sense that in the post-war political climate being a believer had become somewhat safer than before the war? Had his war experience changed his view of the world? The interrogators showed no interest in these questions.

More oddly, even though Borzak stated when first interrogated that he had been arrested for having refused to serve in the military in 1934 (when he was 46), the police and prosecutors did not question him on this point of much significance. Buttressed by evidence of his earlier arrest, they could have made him out to be a convinced ‘anti-Soviet’ criminal of long standing. Yet, according to the case file, they evinced no interest in his 1934 arrest.

After he began to attend the meetings of Seventh-Day Adventists in 1949, Borzak became acquainted with Reformed Adventists: Grigorii Ivanovich Shabel’nik (living in the village of Cherkas) and Ivan T. Babenko (of Popravka). They condemned the fallacy of the Seventh-Day Adventist doctrine (which obliged Soviet citizens to serve in the army) as infringing on God’s commandment. Therefore, one should abandon the Seventh-Day Adventists. By studying the teaching of the Reformed Adventists, Borzak became convinced that this latter teaching was correct and reached an appropriate conclusion. Then he made a clear statement, according to the police file:

I'm against the intervention of the Soviet government in church affairs and disagree with the decision of the [1928] Congress of Seventh-Day Adventists concerning military issues. Following Moses's Sixth Commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill,' I'm opposed to defending the Soviet Union with arms in hand. I have no enemies and to me it's all the same what government rules in Russia [sic]. In the event of a foreign invasion of the Soviet Union, I'll not resist, because I must love my enemies.

Asked whether he recognized the Soviet government as legitimate, Borzak, like others arrested with him, answered: 'I recognize the divine authority as legitimate and recognize the Soviet government only within the limits of my religious convictions. The Soviet laws that contravene my convictions I don't recognize and refuse to obey' (1:167–8).

The interrogators pressed Borzak to name all Reformed Adventists he knew. He named several (in addition to those he had already mentioned): Fedora Il'chenko, Efrosini'a Ivanovna Donchenko in Popravka, Onufrii Fedorovich Koshukh in the village of Cherkas, and Aleksei Saranchuk, Aleksei Matiuchenko, and Artem Bridnia in the city of Bila Tserkva. Borzak also admitted that he took part in prayer meetings in the houses of Praskov'ia Glivaskaia, Aleksei Saranchuk, and Ivan Babenko (1:168–9).

Borzak's admission of attendance at meetings in the house of the Glivaskaias is odd in that the apparently forced confessions of the Glivaskaias do not mention Borzak. Were they protecting him? The police would have known of Borzak's confessions already when they pressed the Glivaskaias for the names of Reformed Adventists, so why not get the Glivaskaias to implicate him as well?

Borzak was again interrogated two days later, on 20 November, for four and a half hours, from 21:00 to 1:30 of the following day, this time by Khor'kov. Khor'kov recorded Borzak's beliefs carefully: 'We have no enemies on earth, we refuse to kill, for Christ teaches us to love our enemies. According to our teaching, the world is divided into two camps – the camp of proponents of Reformed Adventism and the camp of sinners to whom belong the non-believers and the believers of other doctrines.' This binary view of the world must have appeared familiar to Khor'kov, whose view was almost certainly identical except that in his view the world was divided into the camp of believers of Communism and the camp of non-believers (anti-communists). Khor'kov probably believed that the

secret sect of Reformed Adventists had a hierarchical organization similar to that of the Communist Party. Therefore he asked:

Q: The interrogators possess information that you conducted a secret meeting where the question of electing a presbyter was discussed. Do you confirm it?

A: No, I don't. I've never been to such a meeting where the issue of electing a presbyter was discussed. I've never heard of such a thing from my fellow Adventists.

Pressed to explain how he had acquired the book by Ellen G. White (which the police seized at the time of his arrest), Borzak said that while he was in Latvia in 1948, he received it from a Seventh-Day Adventist. (In a later session, however, he is recorded as saying that in 1947 he bought it from his relatives in Latvia.) He added that apart from his wife, no one had read it. When Khor'kov asked him whom he had won over to the 'anti-Soviet' organization of Reformed Adventists, he categorically replied, 'No one' (1:170–8, 187–8).

On 23 November a resolution to indict Borzak was taken by Khor'kov and endorsed by Zashchitin. The following day the indictment was presented to Borzak, who pleaded guilty. Then, interrogated for three and a half hours, from 14:30 to 18:00, by Rusetskii and Gutov, Borzak changed his story: in 1951 he had won over Dem'ian Grigor'evich Darovskii, an old acquaintance of his who was arrested along with Borzak and others, to the Reformed Adventist sect from the Seventh-Day Adventist Church under the following circumstances. In the summer of 1951 he and Aleksei Matiuchenko met Darovskii at a bazaar in the city of Bila Tserkva. They persuaded him that the Seventh-Day Adventists broke the law of God: Darovskii then joined them (1:180–6).

Three days later, on 26 November, Borzak was placed face to face with the arrested Belokon' in the presence of Khor'kov, Rusetskii, and Vetoshkin. Borzak identified Belokon' as a convinced Reformed Adventist who 'completely shared his anti-Soviet convictions.' Belokon', as noted earlier, refused to answer any questions or sign the paper documenting his refusal (1:189–92).

Ksenia Belik

The interrogators were busy, questioning the more than a dozen accused immediately after their arrests. Ksenia Belik was interrogated on 17 November from 11:00 to 16:10 by secret police officer Sin'ko. (If this date, 17 November, is true, she was already in custody when her arrest warrant was issued.) Asked whether she belonged to the illegal and anti-Soviet sect of Reformed Adventists, Belik answered that she believed in God and was a member of the sect of 'Adventists-Subbotniki,' but that she did not go to meetings. She appeared to be unfamiliar with the term 'Reformed Adventist,' because she added that she did not know whether she was simultaneously an 'Adventist-Subbotnik' and a Reformed Adventist. Sin'ko then sought to nail her down as an anti-Soviet believer by saying that the notebooks seized from her were of a 'reactionary and anti-Soviet nature' and asking why she kept them and read them. She answered that she believed in *The Lessons of Reformed Adventists* (the title of one of the notebooks), so she read it with her son and kept it.

If these questions and answers were what actually happened between them, Belik's guilt must have appeared evident to Sin'ko. Since she believed in *The Lessons of Reformed Adventists*, she must have known that she was a Reformed Adventist. Yet this session, the record of which is rather short, lasted for more than six hours. Much more must have taken place. The session ended with Sin'ko's question (whether Belik recognized the Soviet laws and, if that was the case, whether she would obey them) and Belik's answer: 'I follow those laws of the Soviet government that don't contradict divine law. If they contradict divine law, I cannot follow them. In particular, I cannot follow the Soviet law about killing people in the event of war, because I have no enemies' (1:207).

The following day, 18 November, Sin'ko renewed the questioning of Belik, which lasted from 16:00 to 17:00. She briefly recounted her life: she depended first on her husband (whom she married in 1917) and, after her husband's death in prison in 1942, on her children. From 1948 to 1950, however, she worked as an unskilled worker on various construction sites in the city of Bila Tserkva. Then, from May 1950 onwards, she lived as a dependent of her son Gavriil. After a break, she was further questioned by Sin'ko from 22:00 to 1:30 of 19 November. She now stated that until 1937, the time of the Great Terror, she was not a believer at all. Then in 1937

she became a believer. She joined the sect of ‘Adventists–Subbotniki’ and observed the Saturday Sabbath. She said she was drawn to the sect by her late husband, and once visited an illegal meeting of the sect in 1937. (Later she ‘corrected’ herself by saying not ‘once’ but ‘systematically,’ although it is doubtful whether the sect held secret meetings systematically in the year of the Great Terror. Belik noted that the chapel of Adventists was closed in 1937.) Thereafter she never visited any meeting, but prayed at home with her son, who became an ‘Adventist–Subbotnik’ in 1950: ‘At first my son took my Bible and read it to me and himself, then he bought his own Bible and continued to read it aloud to me and himself.’ Asked again about her attitude towards the Soviet laws, she repeated: ‘I obey divine law’ (1:202–6).

Ksenia Belik’s confessions did not satisfy Sin’ko, who dragged her to another session on 21 November that lasted for four hours from 10:30 to 14:30. She now said that both her husband and her son Gavriil belonged to the anti-Soviet sect of Reformed Adventists, for which they were arrested in 1940. (In other words, Gavriil became a Reformed Adventist not in 1950, as she had earlier asserted, but much earlier, before the war. However, she also said that Gavriil told her that he was arrested in 1940 for ‘hooliganism.’) Her husband used to read the Bible and *The Lessons of Reformed Adventists* all the time, and she listened to him and carefully studied the biblical teaching of Jesus Christ. Despite the arrests of her husband and son and the former’s death, she held to her convictions. (After Gavriil was released from the Gulag, he returned home and told her that he and his father had served their sentences in the same prison camps, but that his father had died in 1942.) In this session, she made further concessions. Now she said that she was a Reformed Adventist (instead of ‘Adventist–Subbotnik’) and that she once went to a meeting that took place in the house of Praskov’ia Glivaskaia (1:210–14). This last confession was given without any context. Surely the interrogator wished to link Belik to other suspects. How Belik got acquainted with Glivaskaia did not interest the interrogator at all.

On 24 November Sin’ko, Khor’kov, and Zashchitin agreed to indict Ksenia Belik. Presented with the indictment, Belik pleaded ‘completely guilty’ (1:215–17).

The interrogation records of these seven accused constitute the largest part of the case file. The remainder are examined in the following chapter. From the records discussed so far, it is clear that the interrogators wanted to present the accused as those who placed divine law above all else. Divine law did infringe on the Soviet laws, especially regarding the military duties of Soviet citizens. Yet what the interrogators sought was to extract from the accused an admission that they propagated their beliefs and agitated others to join them and that they constituted an organization, namely, an illegal sect of believers. It was here that the interrogation records appear most strained. Little evidence exists that the arrested constituted an organization. They all appear to have kept their faith to themselves or within their families. The more private their faith was, the more suspicious it appeared to the police. On the face of it, their confessions may appear to be credible or at least in line with the position of Reformed Adventists. A perusal of the interrogation records, however, reveals changes, inconsistencies, and contradictions in testimony that raise questions about the truthfulness of the confessions.

4 Interrogations (2)

If she is allowed to flout the law
In this way, all authority
In the State will collapse. I will not have that!

King Creon¹

THE INTERROGATIONS OF THE ACCUSED continued at a rapid pace as if the police were racing to meet some deadline. Sometimes one interrogator would claim to have questioned more than one person at the same time. For instance, Sin'ko interrogated Ksenia Belik on 18 November from 22:00 to 1:30. Yet Sin'ko and Rusetskii signed the record of the interrogation of Fedora Il'chenko that took place on the same day from 22:00 to 1:00 (1:234). Sin'ko probably alternated between the two sessions, taking turns with Rusetskii.

The interrogators demanded the same confessions as before: that the arrested secretly held prayer meetings and that they advocated disobedience to Soviet laws in deference to divine law.

Fedora Il'chenko

Like Sekletina Glivaskaia, Il'chenko was illiterate and could not sign the records of her interrogation. Like Sekletina, she did not use her fingerprint in lieu of her signature. Possibly she refused to have her fingerprint used by the police.

The first substantive session began on 18 November with the question of what Il'chenko did during the German occupation of Ukraine. The interrogator probably suspected that she had betrayed the country. Il'chenko answered that she lived in the village of Popravka during the occupation and worked her own private plot. Failing in his attempt at presenting Il'chenko as a traitor, the interrogator then turned to the question of religion:

¹Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Don Taylor (London, 2006), 22–3.

Q: Are you a believer?

A: Yes, I am. I adopted the Christian faith in 1925. I pledged to God at that time that I would obey his law and received baptism. From 1925 to 1938 I followed divine law according to the teaching of the Seventh-Day Adventists. Then I abandoned their teaching and began to follow the teaching of the Reformed Adventists.

Q: In connection with what did you cease to believe in the teaching of the Seventh-Day Adventists?

A: At the last congress of the Seventh-Day Adventists, which I think was in 1928, a resolution was adopted that obliged all Seventh-Day Adventists to follow every day, including the holy day of Saturday, the laws of any government on whose territory the believer resided (for me it's the Soviet government). In addition, it obliged the Adventists to obey unquestioningly the law requiring military service in the army and bearing arms in defence of the motherland. I personally think that by adopting such a resolution the Seventh-Day Adventists deviated from and disobeyed the Word and Law of God. Therefore in 1938 I stopped believing in the teaching of the Seventh-Day Adventists and joined the underground anti-Soviet sect of Reformed Adventists. In this sect I strictly follow the Sixth Commandment of God, 'Thou shalt not kill.'

Q: Following the Sixth Commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill,' as you say, goes against the defence of the Soviet Union in the event of war and undermines the defence capacity of our state!

A: I can not violate the Word of God 'Thou shalt not kill,' *therefore I have no enemies and it's all the same to me personally* what government rules on earth. I strictly follow the Word of God and will never deviate from it. I'll never defend my motherland, the Soviet Union, in any way at all. *If in the event of war I were to help soldiers in any way to kill the invaders of our land, I'd disobey the Word of God*, which I cannot do.

Q: Did you go to the Orthodox Church or to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church?

A: I didn't go and won't go to the Orthodox Church or to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, *because these institutions fol-*

law not the Word of God but the Soviet laws and I disagree with them.

Asked where she went for prayers, she answered that she always went to the house of ‘another Reformed Adventist, Ivan Terent’evich Babenko, a resident of the village of Popravka,’ where another fellow believer, Sergei Borzak, also went. She denied, however, having ever attended any prayer meeting in the city of Bila Tserkva. The interrogation ended, the record of this session was taken, but Il’chenko could not or did not sign the record (1:234–7).

A cursory reading may lead one to believe that Il’chenko’s confessions were credible. It is likely that she was convinced in her faith and knew her fellow believers Babenko and Borzak in her village. Yet, although in his interrogations Borzak mentioned Il’chenko as a Reformed Adventist, he did not say that Il’chenko attended prayer meetings in his house. It is difficult to imagine that in 1938, at the time of the Great Terror, an underground sect of Reformed Adventists existed. Rather, the interrogator appears to be constructing a trap that would link Borzak to Babenko and Il’chenko as an organized group.

In her ‘confessions,’ Il’chenko uses such expressions as ‘underground’ and ‘anti-Soviet’ in describing the Reformed Adventist community to which she claimed to belong. Unless she was a convinced and defiant foe of the Soviet government, it is highly unlikely that she would use such inflammatory expressions. Taking advantage of Il’chenko’s illiteracy, the police clearly elaborated freely in her statement, using expressions familiar and recurrent in their interrogation process.

Five days later, on 23 November, the interrogation of Il’chenko resumed, with Sin’ko in charge. He questioned her on the circumstances under which she became a ‘Reformed Adventist,’ seeking evidence of organized proselytism by Reformed Adventists. Il’chenko stated that from the first days of her ‘conscious’ life she believed in God. She belonged to the Orthodox Church until 1922, then, having understood that the Orthodox Church did not follow divine law, she joined the Baptists and visited their meetings until 1925. When she understood that the Baptists, too, did not follow divine law, she left them, too. In 1925 she joined the Seventh-Day Adventists and was baptised. Until 1938 she attended their meetings and studied the Bible and the Word of Jesus Christ and obeyed the Ten Commandments faithfully. In 1938 it became known to her that

the Seventh-Day Adventists, following the decisions of the 1928 congress, transgressed divine law and called on followers to work on Saturdays and serve in the military. She became convinced that as a Seventh-Day Adventist she would violate divine law and would not be able to join those who would live eternally. So she joined the 'anti-Soviet' sect of Reformed Adventists. According to the records taken by Sin'ko, Il'chenko stated that the Reformed Adventists deemed the divine authority higher than the Soviet government and considered the observance of divine law their first priority. They obeyed the Soviet laws only insofar as they did not contradict divine law. To the Reformed Adventists all humans were brethren. They loved everyone that spoke the Word of God (1:238–41).

Sin'ko then sought to extract more information on who attended the meetings at Babenko's house to which Il'chenko referred in the previous interrogation. Yet Il'chenko named no one other than Babenko and Borzak. Sin'ko pressed her further by saying that he had information that Liubov' Fedorchuk and Polina Gavriliiuk also visited the meetings at Babenko's house. Why had she not mentioned them? Il'chenko insisted that she had never seen them at Babenko's house, although Babenko had once mentioned that they had paid a sick call on him, not on Saturday but in mid-week, and not for saying prayers (1:242).

The following day Sin'ko, Khor'kov, and Zashchitin decided to indict Il'chenko on the same charges as the others, namely, conducting anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation and belonging to an anti-Soviet organization. Sin'ko and Rusetskii presented the indictment to her and interrogated her further. The session was relatively short, lasting a little more than an hour from 12:35 to 13:40. First, they asked whether she would plead guilty to the charges, to which she answered in the affirmative: 'I plead guilty completely.' She admitted, according to the record of this interrogation session, that she belonged to the 'anti-Soviet sectarian organization of Reformed Adventists' and followed divine law strictly. Then she added: 'I also tell other people that we mustn't kill anyone, because that would violate divine law. In that way, owing to my religious convictions, I oppose serving in the Soviet Army and [strengthening] the defence capacity of the Soviet Union.' Furthermore, she declared: 'I admit the fact that I have propagated the anti-Soviet 'teaching' of Reformed Adventists among the population [of the district] in order to recruit new members into my organization. I have to state, however, that I am guilty before

God that I did not propagate his Word enough among the people.' She further admitted that she attended illegal meetings at the house of Ivan Babenko, who read 'sermons which were anti-Soviet in nature.' Then she declared: 'I am again guilty before God that I did not take enough part in illegal meetings and did not promote enough the Word of God in these meetings.' This record, like others, is not signed by Il'chenko (1:245-7).

In this final statement Il'chenko appears even more determined and defiant, so much so that she almost rises to the heroic, a convinced believer, fully cognizant of the anti-Soviet nature of her convictions. She regrets that she was not active and vocal enough, pleading guilty, before God, to the inadequacy of her anti-Soviet activity.

Were this account true to the real person of Il'chenko, one could not but admire her courage. But the record bears the now familiar touch of the Soviet police, bent on presenting the accused as a convinced anti-Soviet element. Il'chenko was poor, vulnerable, and illiterate. The temptation to distort her statements and even fabricate appears to have been irresistible. It should be noted, moreover, that the police claimed that she worked nowhere, whereas the village soviet certified that she and her family worked on the collective farm in the village (see p. 32).

Vasilii Brovchenko ♦

The police could not handle Vasilii Brovchenko, 24, and the youngest in the present case, in the same way: he obstinately resisted police pressure. Even so it is apparent that the police took many liberties in recording the interrogation.

Interrogated on 18 November, the day after his arrest, by Zavrik and Rusetskii, Brovchenko flatly denied that he was a member of the 'illegal anti-Soviet sect' of Reformed Adventists: 'I'm indeed a believing "Adventist," but I don't consider myself a member of the sect, because I wasn't baptized.' If so, then, was he a Seventh-Day Adventist? — the interrogators questioned. Brovchenko replied, 'No, and I have never attended legally operating Seventh-Day Adventist meetings': unlike the Seventh-Day Adventists, he strove to '*follow strictly all the Commandments of Christ and to be guided by them*' in his life:

Striving for an eternal afterlife I consider everything earthly ephemeral, therefore I recognize the authority of God and obey his laws in the first place. The earthly power, namely the Soviet government, I deem temporary and recognize and follow its laws only insofar as they don't contradict my convictions.

Strictly following the Sixth Commandment which is the Law of God, I oppose serving in the Soviet Army and bearing arms in defence of the Motherland . . . I consider it my chief aim [in life] to follow divine law.

These statements were almost certainly police fabrications. Brovchenko was in fact far from a convinced objector to military service. Called up in April 1946 by the Bila Tserkva District Military Committee, he reported to the call. Whatever misgivings he may have had, propitious circumstances bailed him out: he failed the medical examination – he was declared unfit for military duties and was exempted. The tone of his answers at the 18 November interrogation is at variance with his actions in 1946 (1:258–61, 265, 279).

Nevertheless, Brovchenko's interrogation records present him as a firm objector: 'From childhood, even when small, I took part in prayers with my parents who were also believers. Later I began to read religious literature and having grown up I was already firm in my belief.' Brovchenko prayed at home with his parents, wife, and sister. Asked whether he intended to renounce his beliefs, he said, 'No, I'll never renounce my beliefs under any circumstances' (1:261–2).

The following day Zavrik questioned Brovchenko again. This time Zavrik sought to accuse him of the 'illegal proselytization' of his wife, Anna. Apparently his wife had belonged to the legal Seventh-Day Adventist community, but, according to the case file, he had convinced her to convert to his faith by telling her that if she agreed to marry him, she would have to leave the Seventh-Day Adventist congregation and pray with him (1:263–4).

Three days later, on 22 November, Zavrik questioned Brovchenko: 'Who induced you to join the anti-Soviet sect of Reformed Adventists?' Brovchenko answered:

I don't consider myself a member of the sect of Reformed Adventists. In terms of my actions in the sense of obeying the Ten Commandments of Christ, I indeed support the tenets of Re-

formed Adventists, but I don't consider myself a member of their organization. So I cannot say who convinced me to join this sect. I can tell you that I was greatly helped in accepting the position of Reformed Adventists by the upbringing of my parents, particularly my father, who has been a believer since, as far as is known to me, 1927–8. I can't say who concretely induced me into the faith of Reformed Adventists, because I believe that God himself induced me into this faith.

Zavrik may have been pleased that Brovchenko implicated his own father (who was also under arrest), but clearly was not pleased with the last answer crediting God himself. Zavrik then pressed him for names of people whom Brovchenko the son drew into his 'anti-Soviet' faith. Brovchenko merely said, 'None apart from my wife' (1:265–6).

On 25 November, Brovchenko was interrogated by Zavrik for five hours from 11:00 to 16:00. This time, Brovchenko confessed that he attended secret meetings in the house of the Glivaskaia sisters with his parents before moving to the city of Bila Tserkva. He then named Anna Kubenko, Daniil Kirichenko, and Iarema Stetsenko as having also attended the meetings in the house of the Glivaskaias. Initially, Brovchenko denied that the Glivaskaias had ever come to pray at his parents' house. No doubt, presented with Sekletina's confession, Brovchenko admitted that they did in fact come to his parents' house to pray together until the middle of 1950 (1:275–7).

On the same day, 25 November, Brovchenko was presented with an indictment signed and approved by Zavrik, Khor'kov, and Zashchitin. Brovchenko pleaded guilty to charges of not merely conducting anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation (his conversion of his wife perhaps served as evidence of 'propaganda and agitation'), but also of belonging to an anti-Soviet organization, even though he had steadfastly denied ever becoming a member of the sect of Reformed Adventists. However, Brovchenko recanted the confessions he had given earlier on that day, denying that he had ever attended illegal meetings of Reformed Adventists other than at his father's house (1:271–3). This session is noted in the case file as having started at 20:30, with no time indicated for when it ended.

The interrogators were quite clearly interested in uncovering an organized group of believers and sought to extract confessions that would support their agenda.

Liubov' Fedorchuk

From the records of her interrogation, it appears that Fedorchuk gave whatever testimonies the police wanted of her. This probably explains why she was questioned by more officers and prosecutors directly involved in the case than others arrested with her: Zavrik, Gutorov, Sin'ko, Rusetskii, and the assistant prosecutor of special cases of Kiev Oblast' Lednikova. They appear to have wanted to extract from Fedorchuk what they needed to prosecute successfully the case of the fourteen Reformed Adventists.

Fedorchuk was first interrogated by Gutorov from 10:00 to 12:00 on 18 November, the day after she was arrested. She stated that her family moved in 1914 from her native village Shcheniiv in Zhytomyr to the village of Tarasivka, Dymer District, near Bila Tserkva. Until 1929 she worked in her family field. In 1929 she married Aleksandr Khomenko in Tarasivka and had three children. Although two of them died, most likely in the Great Famine of 1932–3, the youngest, Aleksandr, born in 1936 after the famine, survived and at the time (in 1952) lived in the city of Kiev. In 1936, however, her husband left her and moved to Kiev, where he married another woman.

Until the Second World War Fedorchuk worked on the village collective farm. During the war she returned to her native village of Shcheniiv in Zhytomyr and tilled the family land. In 1946 she moved back to Kiev Oblast', to the city of Bila Tserkva, where she lived with her sister Ekaterina Chumachenko, five years her junior. From 1946 to 1947 she worked as a guard at the office of 'Arts Export' in the city. From 1948 to 1950 she took up odd jobs on construction sites, and from 1951 to 1952 worked seasonally collecting seeds in the woods, in the winter finding private employment (1:290–1).

Fedorchuk admitted nothing particularly incriminating in this session. However, on the same day, 18 November, she was interrogated by Sin'ko from 11:30 to 16:10. This session started 30 minutes before the previous session had concluded. It is possible that Sin'ko could not wait for Gutorov to finish his interrogation before beginning his questioning of Fedorchuk. This suggests that, as was often the case in 1937–8, the records of interrogation had been prepared in advance and Fedorchuk was merely pressed to sign them. At any rate, she testified to Sin'ko that from childhood until 1947 she professed Orthodox Christianity, but that in 1947 she visited a

meeting of Seventh-Day Adventists in the city of Bila Tserkva (which took place legally). She listened to people read the Bible. Interested in the scripture, she began to read it herself. She soon left the Orthodox Church and joined the Seventh-Day Adventist congregation. After that, however, the congregation received instruction from Kiev that it must follow the Soviet laws and work on Saturdays. She rejected the instruction, was excommunicated ('disfellowshipped') by the Seventh-Day Adventists, and in 1951 joined the sect of Reformed Adventists. Sin'ko was clearly keen to expose the 'anti-Soviet' nature of her faith. His records claim that Fedorchuk openly rejected Soviet laws:

If some foreigner decides to come and conquer our land, then, according to divine law, only God, not people, can punish him. I believe in divine law and strictly follow it. Inasmuch as I have no enemies, to me it's all the same what kind of government rules Russia [sic]. In the event of a foreign attack on the Soviet Union, I won't resist at all and won't work at military factories, because to do so is against my religious convictions.

Like others arrested, Fedorchuk is said to have stated that she placed divine law above the Soviet laws and that she would obey the latter only insofar as they did not contravene the former (1:291–6).

The following day, it was Zavrik's turn to question Fedorchuk. Fedorchuk confessed to attending prayer meetings in the houses of Ivan Babenko, the Glivaskaia sisters, and Aleksei Matiuchenko. She named Aleksei Saranchuk and Praskov'ia Saranchuk (in addition to Gavriliuk, Darovskii, Ksenia and Gavriil Belik) as taking part in the meetings in the house of the Glivaskaias. She and Gavriliuk joined the Matiuchenkos for prayers in the Matiuchenkos' house, which was in Rotok in the suburbs of Bila Tserkva. Fedorchuk knew another Reformed Adventist called 'Katia' in the village of Shamraivka who was an invalid with three young children. She prayed with her and Gavriliuk in Katia's house. Fedorchuk added that Vasilii Belokon' also attended the meetings at the house of Ivan Babenko in the village of Popravka (1:300–3).

On 20 November, Fedorchuk was interrogated by Gutov and Lednikova for six hours from 10:00 to 16:00. Interestingly, the fact that her only surviving son, Aleksandr, lived separately and did not share his mother's faith was used against her. According to the record of this session, she

tried to convert her son (which meant that she was a proselytizer) but failed: in spite of her ‘persistent anti-Soviet cultivation [of Aleksandr] in a religious spirit,’ she could not get her son to accept her faith. When asked how she understood the First Commandment, ‘I am the Lord Your God . . .’, she responded, ‘I understand and believe that the Lord God is the highest authority over *all gods* on earth, therefore I recognize his authority as legitimate’ (1:311–18).

Based on her confessions, Gutorov, Khor’kiv, and Zashchitin adopted an indictment on 24 November. Another session followed, lasting from 10:00 to 13:30 on that day. Fedorchuk was presented with the indictment. She pleaded guilty ‘on all counts’ to Gutorov and Rusetskii. Naming names, she admitted that she kept contact with approximately twenty Reformed Adventists. Gutorov and Rusetskii ensured that Fedorchuk appeared as a proselytizer: ‘I strictly followed all the Ten Commandments, fully aware that doing so infringed on the Soviet laws . . . I also plead guilty that I didn’t hide my anti-Soviet views and discussed my “teaching” with my relations, neighbours, and my colleagues at work.’ Then she returned to the question of her own son: ‘I indeed raised my son Aleksandr Khomenko in an anti-Soviet spirit and tried to induce him into the Adventist community, but I failed. Now he lives and works in the city of Kiev and lives a normal way of life.’ It is difficult to believe that such a devout believer would have called her son’s secular life ‘normal’ and by implication her own life ‘abnormal.’ This is certainly the wording of Gutorov and Rusetskii (1:307–10).

Finally, Fedorchuk was interrogated briefly by Vетoshkin and Rusetskii on 28 November, from 13:30 to 14:20. This session concerned mainly the religious literature seized from Fedorchuk at the time of her arrest. She testified that all her notebooks were copied by Polina Gavriliuk, but that they were not her personal possessions, as they belonged to the entire community. With Gavriliuk, she journeyed to villages where they took the notebooks and read them together to the villagers (1:319–20).

Like Gavriliuk, Fedorchuk named names and admitted to an active life as a proselytizer. The fact that her own son lived a secular life did not help her, and instead was used to emphasize her ‘anti-Soviet spirit.’ The interrogators managed to extract important confessions from Fedorchuk that would help them to prove the organized nature of her belief and its proselytizing threat.

Gavriil Belik ♦

The testimony of Gavriil Belik, 32, the son of Ksenia Belik (whose interrogations were discussed earlier), is confusing, because, as becomes clear later, the records of interrogation were fabricated by the police. After the trial and sentencing, he wrote impassioned appeals to the court, protesting the entire affair and the fabrication of the evidence.

At any rate, the police managed to record at least superficially convincing confessions from Belik and have him sign them. Immediately after his arrest he provided his personal information to the interrogators on the 'questionnaire of the arrested.' In it he stated that in April 1941 he was sentenced to five years in the Gulag for 'anti-Soviet propaganda.' After the Gulag, he moved to the city of Bila Tserkva near his native village and worked as an electrician at a radio station. After taking a course for diesel-engine drivers, he went to work in Voroshylovhrad in eastern Ukraine. Returning to Bila Tserkva in the autumn of 1949, he first worked at a sugar factory and then at a railway station. Then from the autumn of 1950 he worked at a seed-processing plant, from which he was dismissed at the end of 1951. (He did not mention the reason for it.) Thence he worked with a construction-repair crew in the city (2:5, 8-9).

After recounting his personal history, Belik admitted that at the beginning of 1951 he had visited a meeting of the legally operating community of Seventh-Day Adventists in the city of Bila Tserkva. He also met a man called Artem Bridnia (who was named earlier by Gavriliuk and Borzak) through a woman called Vasilisa Tsimval. Bridnia invited him to his house in the summer of 1950. It turned out that Bridnia had been excommunicated ('disfellowshipped') from the Seventh-Day Adventist Church before the Second World War. Sensing a schism among the Adventists, Belik stopped visiting both the Seventh-Day Adventists and Bridnia. He bought a Bible and started reading it and praying at home. He also admitted that the notebook presented to him by the interrogator, *The Awakening of Reform among the Seventh-Day Adventists*, was his. (Oddly, at the time of his arrest, the seizure of the notebook was not recorded. In his appeal, Gavriil Belik declared that this admission was false.) In contradiction to his mother's testimony that he and his father were arrested in 1940 as anti-Soviet Reformed Adventists, he denied being a Reformed Adventist.

Other than Bridnia, he knew no other Reformed Adventists in the city (2:10–14).

Two days later, on 20 November, interrogated by Gutorov and Vетoshkin for six hours, from 18:00 to 24:00, Belik elaborated on his 1941 conviction. In the autumn of 1940 he had been summoned to the NKVD (secret police) in the city of Kiev and interrogated. Asked about his attitude towards military service, he had stated that if he was drafted to the Red Army, he would serve and bear arms. He had clarified his statement, however, by adding that even if he faced the enemy, he would not kill them, because it would contravene his religious convictions. For this he had been arrested and tried, and had served a five-year sentence. Even now (in 1952), according to the interrogation record, he declared that he would not disobey the Sixth Commandment ('Thou shalt not kill') and therefore could not take up arms in defence of the Soviet government. Reversing his earlier testimony that he knew no Reformed Adventists other than Bridnia, he now admitted that in 1950 or 1951 he had begun to attend meetings of Reformed Adventists at the house of Praskov'ia Glivaskaia and Saranchuk (2:15–19). How he became acquainted with them was not discussed.

The following day Vetoshkin questioned Belik again, from 10:00 to 14:00. According to the record of this session, he gave the same principled religious position as all the others had given. Asked whether he recognized the Soviet government as legitimate, he replied: 'I recognize as legitimate the authority of God in the first place. I recognize the Soviet government within the limits of my religious convictions. I obey only those Soviet laws that don't contradict the religious, or more accurately, divine law.' Asked to clarify what Soviet laws contradicted his religious convictions, he, like the others, stated the laws on universal military service and the laws that required Soviet citizens to work on Saturdays. He insisted that he would not take up arms in defence of the Soviet Union. Nor would he work at military factories producing weapons and ammunitions 'solely for the purpose of killing people' (2:20–3).

On 24 November, Vetoshkin, Khor'kov, and Rusetskii made the decision to indict Belik. On the same day, they presented the indictment to Belik, who, according to the record of the case file, pleaded guilty (2:24–8).

On the surface of it, there is little in Belik's records that cast doubts on his testimony. Yet something of importance is missing from his interroga-

tion records: there is no discussion of his actual military service. When he was arrested, his military service card was seized (see p. 24), indicating that he served at some point in his life. Yet Belik is quoted repeatedly as having refused to render any military service or to work in military factories. In the end, these confessions by Belik proved to have been police fabrications.

It is equally odd that even though the police recorded no books seized from Belik in the search of his house, Belik admitted in the final interrogation to possessing five religious books (one book and four notebooks with excerpts from books including the aforementioned *The Awakening of Reform among the Seventh-Day Adventists*, which, he said, Aleksei Saranchuk had given him to copy). This explanation caused a problem for the police, however, for his mother Ksenia Belik had earlier testified that the books belonged to her late husband and Gavriil's father (1:221–3, 2:13). Apparently concerned with this 'minor' contradiction, the interrogators invented an ingenious solution. Belik is recorded as admitting that when he saw his mother in prison, he asked her to lie and say that the books belonged to his father. Now, Gavriil Belik testified that they belonged to him (2:29–32). This was a convoluted explanation indeed for books that had never been seized in the first place.

Dem'ian Darovskii ♦

Darovskii's case is interesting, because, like Gavriil Belik, after the trial he fought for justice. As will be discussed in chapter 7, his appeal clarifies the lengths to which the police would go to fabricate confessions.

On 18 November, the day after his arrest, Darovskii, 65 years of age, was interrogated by Sin'ko from 12:00 to 13:00. Oddly, Sin'ko was recorded as having interrogated Fedorchuk on the same day at the same time, from 11:30 to 16:10. The opening question concerned where he lived and what he did during the Second World War. Darovskii answered that he had served a ten-year sentence in the Gulag during the war. Sin'ko then asked whether he had worked on a collective farm. Darovskii stated that he had never worked on a collective farm, because he was 'a believer and Reformed Adventist. I obey the Law of God and observe the Sabbath on Saturday and so don't work on collective farms. Formerly [before the war] I didn't work [on collective farms] because I worked in the choir

of the [village] church.' Asked whether he had ever worked at factories, Darovskii said, 'No I've never worked at Soviet factories for the same reason.' Sin'ko then asked Darovskii on what charges he was tried in 1937. Darovskii replied, 'I was accused in 1937 according to the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic article 54-10 and sentenced to ten years of correctional labour for organizing illegal meetings and propagating religious books [written] in an anti-Soviet spirit' (2:43–3v).

Then apparently after a break, Sin'ko interrogated Darovskii again on the same day, from 14:30 to 17:30 (at the time he was also questioning Fedorchuk). At this session Darovskii spoke more about his earlier life. He had lived in the village of Potiivka near the city of Bila Tserkva from 1906 to 1937. After serving the ten-year sentence, Darovskii returned to Potiivka in 1947, and in 1950 moved to the city.

Importantly, in this session he stated that he was once a soldier. In February 1915 he was called up to serve in the tsarist army. He served until the February 1917 revolution, then continued to serve as a soldier under the provisional government. Between October 1917 (when the October revolution took place and the Bolshevik government was established) and February 1918 he served as a soldier in the 'Red Army' (probably meaning an army led by the Bolsheviks because the Red Army was formed only in January 1918). He was demobilized in February 1918 and returned home. He did not say what he did during the turbulent years of the civil war in Ukraine, during which time the land changed hands many times. He merely said he tilled his land. He joined the Orthodox Church in the village as a psalm-singer. Until 1937 he continued to work his private field (in other words, he did not join any collective farm, nor was he dispossessed, probably because he was a poor peasant) and journeyed around the village of Potiivka visiting its residents and singing psalms with them. In 1937 he was arrested for 'anti-Soviet agitation' and served ten years. Next came a series of predictable rote questions:

Q: Are you a believer?

A: Yes, I am.

Q: What confession do you profess?

A: I'm a member of the underground sect of Reformed Adventists and profess the divine law of this sect.

Q: When did you join the sect of Reformed Adventists?

A: I joined the sect of Reformed Adventists at the end of 1951 or in January 1952. Until then I shared the views of Baptists and visited their meetings.

As it became clear at a later session, Darovskii joined the Baptists in the Gulag.

Then Darovskii was asked whether he had received baptism upon joining the sect of Reformed Adventists. He answered in the negative, because, according to him, a Reformed Adventist ‘has to learn divine law by heart before being accepted into the sect as an actual member,’ but he had not yet learnt it by heart. Asked whether he had visited illegal meetings of Reformed Adventists, Darovskii said that he had, though not very often: he had attended probably four times at the house of Aleksei Matiuchenko in the city. Then he stated that he obeyed only divine law, knowing no other authority. He had no enemies on earth and would not serve in the Soviet Army. (At 65, however, he was unlikely to be called up in any case.) He added that his wife, his daughter, and his son-in-law professed Orthodoxy. Although they once tried to dissuade Darovskii from going to illegal meetings of Reformed Adventists, Darovskii did not listen to them (2:44–9).

Two days later, on 20 November, Sin’ko again questioned Darovskii. Pressed about meetings of Reformed Adventists, Darovskii now stated that he had attended other meetings, not just at Matiuchenko’s. (The day before the interrogators had extracted confessions from Sekletina Glivaskaia that Darovskii attended prayer meetings at the Glivaskaias.) Darovskii said that he had gone to the Glivaskaias about three times and to Aleksei Saranchuk’s house about four times (2:50–3).

Three days later, on 23 November, Sin’ko further interrogated Darovskii from 13:15 to 16:00. Regarding the circumstances under which he joined the sect of Reformed Adventists, Darovskii said that he first became acquainted with the Baptists in the Gulag. After he was released from the Gulag in 1947, he continued studying the Bible and believed in the Baptist faith. In the summer of 1951, however, in the village of Potiivka, he met Noga, the presbyter (minister) of the Seventh-Day Adventist community in the city of Bila Tserkva. In conversation with him, Noga told him that the Baptists were not truly Christian, because they violated divine law and worked on Saturdays and so on. So Darovskii asked Noga what faith, then, was truly Christian. Noga’s answer was that the truly Christian church was

the prayer house of Seventh-Day Adventists, of which he was the presbyter in the city of Bila Tserkva. Noga took a Bible from his pocket and read him the Ten Commandments. He told Darovskii that only those who followed the Ten Commandments could be considered truly Christian. Noga then invited Darovskii to visit his prayer house in the city.

This episode suggests that Noga was likely acting as a police provocateur. The officially recognized Seventh-Day Adventist Church explicitly obliged its followers to work on Saturdays and serve in the military. This was why the dissenters defected from the church. Indeed, as will be discussed, Noga subsequently appeared as a prosecution witness at the trial.

After attending Noga's prayer meetings twice, Darovskii saw his old acquaintance Sergei Borzak at a bazaar in the city. Borzak told him that the Seventh-Day Adventists were in cahoots with the Soviet government and transgressed divine law. Thereupon Darovskii asked Borzak what faith he professed. Borzak and the man who was with him, Aleksei Matiuchenko, invited Darovskii to Matiuchenko's house for prayer. When Darovskii went with them, he learned that they were called 'Reformed Adventists.' They read the same Ten Commandments to him as had Noga. Darovskii accepted the commandments as inviolable, and thus became a Reformed Adventist (2:54–9).

Were Borzak and Darovskii actually old acquaintances? If so, what was their relationship? How had their paths crossed? Their nexus was never explained by either. Significantly, Borzak was interrogated at the same time on 23 November, from 14:30 to 18:00, as was Darovskii, from 13:15 to 16:00. It seems quite likely that the story of Darovskii's recruitment was a police fabrication designed to link the 'confessions' of the two men. Subsequently, at the trial, Borzak denied that he had ever recruited anyone.

The following day, 24 November, Sin'ko wrote an indictment of Darovskii. Khor'kov attached his agreement to it, and Zashchitin approved it. Then Sin'ko interrogated Darovskii once again, from 10:30 to 12:30. Darovskii pleaded guilty 'on all counts,' and offered further self-incriminating testimonies. He stated that he had tried in vain to recruit into his sect other people, for instance, his son-in-law Manuil Grigor'evich Prisiazhniuk. (As will be discussed in the next chapter, Prisiazhniuk had been interrogated by the police *before* Darovskii's arrest and his testimony appears to have played a role in Darovskii's arrest.) Meanwhile, the police claimed to have discovered (although it is difficult to believe that the police

would have missed such an important fact) that Darovskii had an even richer ‘criminal’ past than he had confessed to earlier. He was now forced to admit that he had hidden the fact from the police that he had received not only ten years in 1937 but also three years in 1934, while he was an Orthodox Christian, for making ‘anti-Soviet remarks’ (2:60–1, 62–5).

Two days later, on 26 November, Subbotin, Rusetskii, and Vetoshkin made him confront Vasilii Belokon’. Darovskii identified Belokon’ as a ‘Christian elder brethren’ whom he had met repeatedly in Saranchuk’s and the Glivaskaias’ houses. Darovskii added that he also ran into Belokon’ in August 1952 at a bazaar in the city where he (Belokon’) was selling apples. This casual aside by Darovskii is of much interest. It seems to suggest that far from having no steady job, Belokon’ eked out his living by selling apples and other farm produce at a bazaar. Whatever the case may be, Belokon’, as discussed earlier, refused to answer any questions by the interrogators (2:66–8).

On that day, from 21:30 until 35 minutes after midnight, Darovskii was interrogated by Subbotin. Darovskii repeated that Belokon’ was regarded among the Reformed Adventists as an ‘elder brethren’ in faith because he had been an ‘old member of the underground sect’ and knew well the faith of the Reformed Adventists. Regarding the Soviet law on military service, Darovskii stated, ‘This is not our business and I don’t accept this law, because this doesn’t come from God’ (2:68–72).

Were Darovskii a devout Reformed Adventist, these statements might have been credible. As became clear later, however, they were dictated by the police.

Arkhip Brovchenko ♦

Arkhip Brovchenko, the father of Vasilii Brovchenko (discussed earlier), had long been associated with the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. He broke off his association in the violent decade of the 1930s, only to resume it after the war.

Like others, he was interrogated on 18 November, the day after his arrest, from 16:00 to 18:00. Gutorov was in charge. Brovchenko stated that in 1932 he joined the village collective farm, where until 1941 he worked in the fields in various capacities. During the period of German

occupation from 1941 to 1943 he worked on his private land. After Ukraine was liberated from the German occupiers, he could find no steady job, but occasionally found private employment. In 1951 he moved to the city of Bila Tserkva (2:81).

Gutorov then moved on to more substantive topics. According to Brovchenko's testimony, in 1927 he and his wife joined the sect of Seventh-Day Adventists in the village of Trushky. He was baptized in the river Ros', a tributary of the Dnieper River. In 1933 he left the sect and thereafter never attended its meetings. His children, Vasilii and Oksana, born after he left the sect, were not baptized. In the summer of 1952, however, Brovchenko began to take part in prayer meetings at the house of the Glivaskaias in the city. His children did not take part, but he had brought them up in the spirit of 'Adventism' from childhood, performed religious ceremonies, and prayed at home. Brovchenko, like others arrested, insisted that he faithfully followed the Ten Commandments, particularly the Fourth and the Sixth. Asked whether he did not regard as enemies the German occupiers who sought to exterminate the Soviet Union, he said that he had no enemies and it made no difference to him what government ruled 'Russia [sic]' and therefore he would not take up arms in defence of the Soviet government. He added that he viewed every earthly power as ephemeral and that he sought eternal afterlife and lived by this quest. He obeyed the Soviet laws only insofar as they did not contravene divine law (2:82–6).

Three days later, on 21 November, Brovchenko was interrogated again by Gutorov for six hours, from 10:00 to 16:00. This time Gutorov sought more details on Brovchenko's conversion to Reformed Adventism. Brovchenko now said that he joined the Reformist movement much earlier, in the 1930s. In 1934, the Church of Seventh-Day Adventists in his village broke off owing to the decision of the 1928 congress. It was Artem Bridnia (a resident of the city of Bila Tserkva) who took the most active role in the schism in the village. In 1938 the legally operating sect collapsed (undoubtedly under tremendous police terror). The illegal sect (of Reformed Adventists), created by Bridnia, survived and Brovchenko 'joined' it in 1938. He harboured doubts, but he stood by his 'anti-Soviet' convictions. (It was Bridnia, according to Brovchenko, who trained him in an anti-Soviet spirit.) No meetings were held because meetings were 'banned' by the Soviet organs. When the Germans occupied Ukraine, he and other

Reformed Adventists resumed their activity and held prayer meetings in members' houses. Even after the Germans left and the Soviet government returned, they continued to hold illegal meetings. Brovchenko himself held meetings in his own house (at which sometimes Vasilii Belokon' and Artem Bridnia took part as leaders). At such meetings, they read the Bible, the Evangel, *Biblical Conversations*, and other literature. Brovchenko maintained contact with Aleksei Saranchuk and Petr Pilipenko. Brovchenko also went to secret prayer meetings at the Glivaskaias' home in Matiushin before the sisters moved to the city (2:87–93).

This new story by Brovchenko is unverifiable. If no meetings were held in the 1930s, one wonders what 'sect' he joined. Individual beliefs may have survived, but organizations most likely did not, even underground. It is difficult to imagine, as in the case with Il'chenko's confession, that the legal Adventist group would have been destroyed while the illegal group survived in the 1930s.

The police did not question Brovchenko about his military service. When he was arrested, a certificate of exemption from military duties was seized (see p. 26). It is not known when that certificate was issued or by whom. It is possible and even likely that it dated back to the period of the civil war (1918–20) and the early 1920s, when Lenin's government recognized conscientious objection. Born in 1899, Brovchenko was of call-up age at the time. The police probably ignored this inconvenient fact.

At any rate, four days later, on 25 November, Brovchenko was presented with an indictment by Gutorov, Khor'kov, and Zashchitin and pleaded guilty 'completely.' Then he added:

I admit on the basis of the First Commandment that God's authority is the highest and legitimate. I recognize all earthly powers, including the Soviet government, only within the limits of my faith. I don't hide my non-Soviet views and based on the 'teaching' of Reformed Adventists I have brought up my children in the same spirit, Oksana Brovchenko and Vasilii Brovchenko, the latter having been arrested with me for similar activities.

The police managed to frame Arkhip Brovchenko as a long-standing and active member of the illegal and 'anti-Soviet' sect of Reformed Adventists (2:97–100).

The twenty-ninth of November was a Saturday, the Sabbath for the Reformed Adventists. On that day, the police subjected Brovchenko to further investigation. This session concerned the religious literature seized from him. Brovchenko stated that he received *The Psalms of Zion* from the presbyter of Adventists a very long time ago, in 1927 or 1928 (2:101–2). This ended Brovchenko's pre-trial interrogations.

Ivan Babenko ♦

The last person in this case file is the oldest, Ivan Babenko, 68. As discussed in chapter 1, his village soviet chairman testified to the police that Babenko held meetings of believers in his own house and was warned about the illegality of such meetings of unregistered believers. Although the chairman's testimony may not have been truthful, Babenko appears to have incriminated himself without resistance.

Interrogated on 18 November, the day after his arrest, by Vetoshkin from 12:00 to 14:00, Babenko briefly recounted his life: in 1929 and 1930 the collectivization campaign created a collective farm in Popravka, which he joined then. He worked there until 1941. During the war he was not called upon to serve in the military because of his age (he was 57 in 1941). He even added that he had never served in the Soviet military. This may mean that he somehow managed to avoid military duties in the 1920s and the 1930s, although given his age (he was 46 in 1930, for example) he may not have been called up at all. During the war he said that he had worked as an ordinary labourer (2:111–114).

Later on that day Vetoshkin and Rusetskii questioned Babenko further. Babenko stated that he joined the Seventh-Day Adventist community in 1926 in his village of Popravka. When the famous decision of the 1928 congress of Adventists became known, Babenko disagreed. The village community of Seventh-Day Adventists was disbanded in any case at the time of the collectivization of agriculture and he joined the newly created collective farm. He claimed that after that he had never attended any religious meetings. Because he stopped attending meetings, he began to lose his religious convictions. Oddly, he was recorded as saying that in 1948, he 'again' joined the sect of Reformed Adventists and began to read religious literature, attend meetings, and pray at home. The word 'again'

seems to have been added by the interrogators (who, without any evidence, believed that Babenko had joined the Reformed Adventist sect in 1928).

Like others arrested, Babenko stated that he faithfully followed divine law and obeyed the Soviet laws only insofar as they did not contravene divine law. Probably presented with the testimony of the village soviet chairman, Babenko admitted that he held illegal prayer meetings in his own house and attended meetings at Sergei Borzak's home. At such meetings they had read the Bible and journals published in the 1920s by the Adventists and sang psalms. He insisted, however, that he had never attended any such meetings in the city of Bila Tserkva, although in 1951 he had on occasion visited Aleksei Saranchuk at his home (2:112–16).

It is odd that the interrogators did not press Babenko to explain how and why he 'again' joined the sect of Reformed Adventists. Who had recruited him? How had he found the secret sect? The fact that the police did not pose the questions that always interested them most suggests that they had something to hide.

In any case, Babenko was presented with an indictment on 24 November by Vетoshkin, Khor'kov, and Zashchitin. He pleaded guilty. He even further incriminated himself by portraying himself as a proselytizer: 'Indeed I did not hide Christ's teaching from anyone and brought up my granddaughter Vera Ignat'evna Babenko who lives with me in the spirit of Christ. As a result she became a member of our sect' (2:117–24). Vera Babenko was later used by the prosecution as a witness against her own grandfather (see chapter 6).

Two days later, on 26 November, Babenko was subjected to further interrogation by Gutorov and Rusetskii, from 20:00 to 23:00. In this session the interrogators' main interest was his connections to Belokon'. Babenko had heard about Belokon' in 1950 from Grigorii Shabel'nik of Cherkas, and in the autumn of 1951 met Belokon' for the first time. Belokon' and Shabel'nik visited Babenko's house for prayers. He also knew Belokon's son Sergei, whom he had met twice or thrice in the market of Bila Tserkva. (Could it be that he, like his father, sold apples in the market?) Asked what they did in the meetings apart from prayers, Babenko said:

Apart from prayers we discussed problems of our relations to the government. In these conversations we, namely Vasilii Belokon', myself, Ivan Babenko, Sergei Borzak, Fedora Il'chenko

and Grigorii Shabel'nik, agreed that the Soviet government interfered in church matters and the Seventh-Day Adventists didn't oppose it, on the contrary they decided that along with all other Soviet citizens the Adventists should perform military duties and bear arms to defend the Soviet Union and also work on Saturdays. In these meetings we strengthened our mutual determination not to deviate from the truth as the Seventh-Day Adventists had, we'd never break divine law and we'd obey the Soviet laws only within the limits of our beliefs.

The police thus presented Babenko as a defiant conspirator (2:128–32).

On 27 November Gutorov and Rusetskii confronted Babenko with Belokon' for identification. Babenko identified the man as Belokon' and testified that he had known him as a Reformed Adventist from the autumn of 1951 and that Belokon' had two or three times joined illegal prayer meetings in his house. Belokon', as discussed earlier, refused to answer any question or sign the record of this confrontation (2:126–7).

Like Arkhip Brovchenko, Babenko was interrogated on the Sabbath day, Saturday, 29 November, by Vetoshkin and Rusetskii for 50 minutes, from 12:30 to 13:20. The questioning concerned the religious literature seized from him at the time of arrest. Babenko stated that he bought *The Psalms of Zion* from an Adventist preacher before the collectivization of agriculture, in 1926 or 1927. Regarding the *Testimonies for the Church*, Babenko said that he received it from the presbyter of Seventh-Day Adventists Noga to read (2:125).

It is very odd that Babenko, a Reformed Adventist, knew Noga, the opponent of Reformed Adventists, well enough to receive a book. What was the relationship between Babenko and Noga? When did Babenko receive Ellen G. White's book from Noga? Babenko said that he was already a Reformed Adventist at the time (2:125). Was Babenko, like Darovskii, somehow ensnared by Noga? Naturally, the police were not interested in these important questions. One wonders whether Babenko was in fact a Seventh-Day Adventist, but was threatened by the police and subsequently used as a provocateur to trap suspected Reformed Adventists.

In the view of the interrogators, Belokon's silence and refusal to speak signified an eloquent proof of his guilt. They must have been infuriated, but unlike in 1937–8, they could not sentence him without the formality

of a trial. The records of all the others, however, have a very familiar pattern of either outright confessions of guilt or denials followed by rote confessions. The police made a concerted effort to present a coherent case of an 'anti-Soviet' underground sect. Yet a careful perusal of the case file raises enough questions about many details of the case to call into question any foregone conclusion of guilt.

5 Testimonies and Confrontations

Abstain from false speech.

Buddha

SELF-INCRIMINATING CONFESSIONS were enough to indict people even in the Soviet Union of 1952. After all, it was still under Stalin. Yet the police made further efforts to strengthen their case by questioning witnesses and conducting confrontations (*ochnye stavki*, a practice used to verify testimonies or resolve conflicting testimonies by confronting the accused with their witnesses as well as one defendant with another). Like the records of interrogation, the testimonies and records of confrontations give an apparent coherence to the case. But the coherence is only apparent, the result of an elaborate orchestration of events by the police. A perusal of the records thus reveals numerous inconsistencies and contradictions.

All the witnesses were summoned by the prosecution. No records exist that witnesses were summoned by the defence.

Ivan Noga

The earliest testimony (apart from Egorov and Bobysheva from an earlier case in Kiev discussed in chapter 1) concerns Ivan Noga, the presbyter of Seventh-Day Adventists in the city of Bila Tserkva, associated with several of the arrested. His testimony was an important prelude to the present case. Two months before the arrests of the thirteen accused, on 17 September 1952, Lieutenant Fedorovich of the MGB in Kiev Oblast' questioned Noga. He said he lived in the city. Elsewhere in the case file, however, it is said that he had moved in 1950 to the city of Uman', approximately 100 kilometres to the south of Bila Tserkva, as a presbyter. Noga was 56 years of age (2:140, 308, 353–4).

The records of his interrogation show how little informed Noga was about his own faith as a presbyter. He stated that the Seventh-Day Adventist sect was born in 1848, but did not know where that religious

movement started or who founded it! He said that a schism then occurred in 1914–15, because a reactionary group of delegates to the conference of Adventists began to interpret incorrectly the Sixth Commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ whereas the real Seventh-Day Adventists maintained that the Sixth Commandment should not be a hurdle to serving in the military.

Here Noga’s testimony contradicts that of Darovskii, a defendant in the case. According to Darovskii, Noga had urged him to renounce his Baptist faith, because the Baptists, who were not truly Christian, violated divine law and worked on Saturdays and so on, and that only those who followed the Ten Commandments could be considered truly Christian (see p. 98).

When Fedorovich asked Noga who the original ‘initiator of the schism’ was, Noga replied, ‘I don’t know.’ Noga insisted, however, that the underground sect of Reformed Adventists existed in the Bila Tserkva area. Then he named names: in the city of Bila Tserkva, there were two leaders, Artem Kuz’mich Bridnia and Vasilii Belokon’, and approximately 20 members; in the village of Fursy there were about five members, in the village of Popravka about 15, in the village of Potiivka about five, and in other villages others whose numbers he did not know for sure (2:140–4).

Noga’s testimony on Artem Bridnia went as follows. Bridnia was originally from the village of Fursy and about Noga’s age. He lived on Second Nazareth Street. He was de-kulakized (dispossessed as a rich, exploitative peasant) in the 1930s. He worked nowhere but ran a ‘private business’ (probably clandestinely) as a joiner. He lived with his family but poorly. He preached ‘life without women’ (*bezzhenstvo*, or celibacy for men) and for that reason he lived in ‘eternal scandal’ with his wife! (According to the testimony of Gavriliuk, he had recently kicked out his wife [see p. 64].) Artem’s son, Aleksei Bridnia, about 30 years of age, and his wife were also Reformed Adventists. They lived in a railway settlement in the city.

He went on to implicate Artem Bridnia’s son-in-law, Aleksei Matiuchenko (see p. 64) and Vasill Belokon’, the chief defendant, who refused to speak to his interrogators. Matiuchenko was about 40 years of age and living in the village of Rotok, Bila Tserkva District, and was also a Reformed Adventist, as were his wife and daughter. Belokon’ was about Noga’s age, but Noga added that because of his beard, he looked much older. Noga knew that Belokon’ had a family somewhere, but did not

know exactly where. At the same time, however, Noga said that Belokon' lived in a dugout in a settlement with his son, Sergei, who had served a prison term for refusing military duties. (He did not say where the settlement was located, in Bila Tserka or Vinnytsia. Sergei was sentenced to ten years in the Gulag in 1944, but apparently was released before his term expired.) They held illegal prayer meetings and were categorically opposed to serving in the Soviet Army (2:145–7).

According to Noga, because of Belokon's 'degenerating activity' among the Seventh-Day Adventist community in the village of Popravka, the entire congregation of 21 members had converted to Reformed Adventism in 1950. Yet Noga immediately added that he wished to correct his statement: the Popravka community disintegrated not because of Belokon' – all members but its presbyter had adopted an 'anti-Soviet' stance when they were confronted with a letter sent from Kiev regarding the Sixth Commandment and military obligation. Belokon' simply took advantage of this. According to Noga, Polina Gavriliuk, Tat'iana Kravets (who was known in the city as a 'woman of dubious reputation' until she joined the Seventh-Day Adventist community, the same individual whom Gavriliuk named [see p. 67]), Ol'ga Koroza, and Lykova (Vasilisa Tsimval) were all excommunicated ('disfellowshipped') from the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Liubov' Fedorchuk, too, was expelled: she was now divorced because her husband, who was not a believer, no longer wanted to live with her (2:148–52).

After the arrests of many of those whom he denounced as Reformed Adventists, Noga was once again questioned as a witness, this time by Sin'ko, on 25 November. In this session he gave more details about the collapse of the Seventh-Day Adventist congregation in Popravka. In 1950 (Gavriliuk said in 1948 [see p. 66]) a representative came from Kiev to read a directive from the centre to the village meeting of Seventh-Day Adventists. The directive instructed that all Seventh-Day Adventists were obliged to serve in the military for the purpose of defending the country and that this did not contravene the Sixth Commandment. 'Many' people (earlier he said 'all but the presbyter') did not come back to prayer meetings after this incident. Apparently more cautious this time, Noga stated that he believed that they joined the sect of Reformed Adventists. He also recanted his contention that Aleksei Bridnia, the son of Artem Bridnia, whom Noga earlier denounced as a leader of Reformed Adventists in Bila Tserkva,

belonged to the ‘anti-Soviet’ sect of Reformed Adventists. In fact, he said that he knew nothing about Aleksei’s faith. If he had said otherwise on 17 September, it was a mistake. He stated that he knew nothing about the Brovchenko family’s religious life, even though they were distant relatives of his. As for Borzak, he wanted to join the Seventh-Day Adventist congregation in 1949. He was not accepted, however, because he had broken the Seventh Commandment (‘Thou shalt not commit adultery’) (2:157–63).

As a presbyter, Noga was most likely obliged to inform the police regularly of the religious life of his parish, including the activity of other sectarians. The 17 September interrogation would seem to have been a routine meeting with the police, but it may have been as well a meeting in which he was expected to give compromising accounts of his confessional rivals and ‘apostates.’ Though apparently ignorant and demoralized, Noga understood his role and informed on his rivals, distorting and overstating their activity. When Noga was forced to confront some of the alleged Reformed Adventists he had denounced, he again ‘corrected’ his statement. No doubt frightened by the arrests of some of the people he had denounced, Noga corrected some of his earlier testimonies.

In addition to Noga, the central witness, several more witnesses were deposed on 17 November, the day before the thirteen accused were arrested.

Matrena Levshchenko

Matrena Kharistonovna Levshchenko, 35, a widow and a neighbour of the Glivaskaia sisters, was questioned by Zavrik. According to Levshchenko, the Glivaskaia sisters did not associate with anyone except their fellow believers, Aleksei Saranchuk and his wife Pelageia, who lived nearby. She witnessed many Saturday meetings in their house where they prayed together. There were many such meetings the previous year (1951), but that year (1952) they seemed to journey away more often than hold meetings on Saturdays. Where they went Levshchenko did not know. She further stated that Aleksei Saranchuk was ‘mentally abnormal’ and worked nowhere. When asked whether she knew of any ‘anti-Soviet’ activity of the Glivaskaia sisters, Levshchenko repeated her statement about the

meetings of believers in their house. Even though she had just said that she witnessed many prayer meetings in their house on Saturdays, she now said that she could not say exactly what took place in these meetings (2:164–7).

According to the case file, Levshchenko admitted to recognizing someone in the hall of the secret police building who had visited the Glivaskaia sisters. So she was led to confront this someone for identification purposes in the presence of Zavrik and Rusetskii. This someone turned out to be Gavriil Belik. Levshchenko insisted that she had seen Belik ‘up to three times’ at the house of the Glivaskaia sisters in the summer of 1951. Astonished, Belik responded that he did not know Levshchenko: ‘I do not confirm her testimonies. During the summer of 1951 I never visited the Glivaskaias. I didn’t take part in meetings. I didn’t know Praskov’ia Ivanovna Glivaskaia at all in 1951. I first became acquainted with her in the spring of 1952.’ Zavrik noted that the ‘detained Belik’ refused to sign the record of the confrontation. Zavrik and Rusetskii therefore had to sign a special act which read that Belik ‘categorically refused to sign the deposition protocol of confrontation, on the grounds that the witness Levshchenko is not objective in her depositions’ (2:168–70).

Levshchenko’s testimony against Belik was taken probably because he initially refused to give self-incriminating testimonies. He was not easily broken. So it is likely that the police attempted to use Levshchenko to break him. He still refused to sign the record of confrontation with Levshchenko. In the end, as discussed in chapter 4, Belik was broken and offered contradictory testimonies later in the interrogation process.

Manuil Prisiazhniuk

The police very often deposed relatives as witnesses in order to gather (or fabricate) evidence. Manuil Prisiazhniuk, 46, the son-in-law of Darovskii, was deposed by Sin’ko on 17 November. He lived in the same house as his father-in-law, at 25 Stavyshchans’ka Street in the city of Bila Tserkva. Prisiazhniuk stated that he and Darovskii had argued twice about their religious differences – he professed Orthodoxy and Darovskii ‘Saturdayism.’ Prisiazhniuk further stated that Darovskii believed in ‘some kind of afterlife.’ Asked what sect Darovskii belonged to, Prisiazhniuk confessed that he did not know. Darovskii went neither to Orthodox churches nor

to prayer houses, but every Saturday or Friday night he read the Bible to himself and copied out some religious literature by hand. Sometimes, he visited with religious books and notes someone called Aleksei [Saranchuk?] (whose surname he did not know, but who he knew lived in the city of Bila Tserkva). Asked whether Darovskii held any prayer meeting in his house, he noted only one incident in which some old man from Popravka stayed one night with Darovskii and read some religious books with him.

Prisiazhniuk's deposition was not very helpful to Sin'ko. However, Sin'ko got Prisiazhniuk to confess that Darovskii twice sought to recruit him into his sect, but that he disagreed with Darovskii's faith and refused. Darovskii constantly insisted on obeying divine law, saying that the time would come soon to ascend to an eternal afterlife. Encouraged, Sin'ko pressed Prisiazhniuk to discuss Darovskii's 'anti-Soviet' remarks, but Prisiazhniuk said that he had not heard any from Darovskii (2:171–4). Even so, Sin'ko had now obtained 'evidence' of Darovskii's propaganda of his illegal faith.

Mariia Stasiuk

At the same time, another witness, Mariia Aleksandrovna Stasiuk, 33, a neighbour of the Glivaskaia sisters, was deposed by Zavrik. Stasiuk said of the sisters that they were called 'Saturdayists,' because they did not work on Saturdays and that 'strangers' often visited the sisters' house. Asked to name them, she mentioned two names: Polia [Gavriliiuk], a young woman living in the same building as the Glivaskaia sisters, and Liuba [Fedorchuk], approximately 45, living in the city near the 'Big Factory.' Stasiuk stated that she knew no one else. Asked whether the sisters made any 'anti-Soviet' remarks, Stasiuk said that she had heard none. When asked whether she had anything to add, she said, 'No' (2:175–7).

Although Zavrik could not extract any incriminating testimony, one interesting detail emerged later. Stasiuk and her husband were both Seventh-Day Adventists. Their marriage, however, was 'illegal' (details unknown), and therefore they were excommunicated ('disfellowshipped') from the sect (2:355). The building in which they and the Glivaskaia sisters lived appears to have been a sort of 'ghetto' inhabited by many who had been excommunicated from the Seventh-Day Adventist congregation.

How the police chose the witnesses is not known. What is known is that they considered of critical importance testimonies by spouses, family members, and neighbours who knew the accused intimately. Inasmuch as the police assumed that they were dealing with a deeply conspiratorial underground sect, they must have felt the need to penetrate the private spheres of the accused.

Vladimir Chumachenko

Again on 17 November, Vetoshkin deposed one Vladimir Stepanovich Chumachenko, 47, a brother-in-law of Liubov' Fedorchuk living in the city of Bila Tserkva. Fedorchuk lived with the Chumachenkos in 1946–8 and from August 1952 to that day. Chumachenko stated that Fedorchuk called herself a ‘Saturdayist,’ but in fact he did not know exactly to which sect she belonged. Asked whether he knew of Fedorchuk’s ‘anti-Soviet’ sectarian activity, Chumachenko found it difficult to answer. He stated, however, that he did know that she had books of psalms in the house. At some point, she began to read them to his wife, Ekaterina, and to indoctrinate her in her religion. When he realized what she was doing, he forbade Fedorchuk from having any religious conversations with his wife and told the latter that she could have nothing to do with her sister in matters of religion. After that Fedorchuk stopped discussing religion in the house. Fedorchuk often entertained her co-believer Polina Gavriliuk. They often went out for prayers on Saturdays and to the village of Shamraivka, but for what purpose he did not know. Vetoshkin then pressed Chumachenko to admit that Fedorchuk had duplicated religious books by copying them for distribution. Chumachenko replied, however, that he knew nothing about it, although he knew that she had acquired books of psalms copied by someone. He had nothing more to add (2:178–81).

Vetoshkin thus obtained ‘evidence’ of ‘propaganda’ by Fedorchuk. Yet if Fedorchuk indeed had sought to indoctrinate her sister in her faith, why hadn’t the police deposed her sister Ekaterina instead of Ekaterina’s husband? This is merely one of many questions that arise in reading the case file. It is possible that Ekaterina refused to testify or refused to give the testimony against her own sister that the police wanted, whereas her husband, Vladimir, did not.

Obviously, the interrogators could not always extract at will confessions they needed. One simply cannot know just how much threat and force was used. What is clear is that some people gave false testimony against others and against themselves, as is clear from subsequent recantations.

Anna Belik

The next witness to be deposed on 17 November was the wife of Gavriil Belik. Anna Artemovna Belik, 25, had married Gavriil Belik in 1947. Marriage was not sacred in the Soviet Union. Spouses were forced (and had the obligation) to give testimony against and inform on one another if they knew that crimes had been committed. The police started the deposition with invasive questions about their marital relations. Anna had to say that she had ‘normal’ relations with Gavriil, but that they did have some ‘family quarrels.’ The police official Gutorov pressed her for details. She stated that Gavriil was her second husband; her first husband was in the Gulag, serving a ten-year sentence since 1946. According to her, Gavriil often berated her, saying that as soon as her first husband returned from the Gulag (which would be in 1956, four years later), she would leave Gavriil for him. His accusations led to quarrels. In addition, they differed sharply in their religious beliefs. She was not a believer, whereas he was a ‘Saturdayist.’ On this basis, too, quarrels took place (2:182–3).

When they married, according to Anna, Gavriil had not been a sectarian. He did tell her that he had been raised by his father, a believer. In spite of his upbringing, Gavriil had abandoned religion and lived his life ‘like all other Soviet citizens’ until 1949. On 1 January 1949, he returned home and declared that on that day he had become a believer and asked her not to cook pork. Anna asked him, ‘What now?’, to which he replied: ‘I’d like to be saved, because the end of the world will arrive soon, God will descend and give eternal life to the believers. To be saved, it’s necessary to believe in God and observe the Saturday Sabbath.’

He even remonstrated with her that she did not know what ‘divine salvation’ was. Subsequently he bought a Bible, studied it carefully, and observed the Sabbath on Saturdays. Every Saturday he read religious literature, prayed, and did not work, smoke, drink, or go to the cinema. In order to observe the Sabbath on Saturdays, he negotiated with his supervisors for release from work. (If so, there were sympathetic bosses as

well, but these bosses were not deposed or at least there are no records of their depositions.) Gavril insisted that he had no enemies on earth and so could not kill anyone. He did not go to cinema or theatre, claiming that it would go against his faith. Gutorov asked Anna whether Gavriil ever tried to recruit her to his faith. She said, ‘No,’ because he knew that she was against all religion. Asked to name his co-believers, Anna named two: Darovskii (their neighbour) and Saranchuk (whose first names she did not know), because, she said, they visited her husband at home. She added that Gavriil’s mother, Ksenia, was also a ‘Saturdayist’ and that the mother and son studied the Bible and performed religious rites together (2:184–7).

This is a colourful, powerful, and even credible testimony coming from a spouse. (Moreover, from the perspective of Soviet authorities, the fact of her being a non-believer, that is, a good Soviet citizen, enhanced her credibility.) Yet, from a different perspective, precisely because the testimony was given by a spouse, it needs to be treated thoughtfully. Anna, after all, was once married to a man then serving prison time in the Gulag. It is possible, as was often the case, that their divorce was calculated to shield her from conjugal ‘collective responsibility.’ (Hence the fear of Gavriil that she would abandon him upon her first husband’s release from the Gulag.) At any rate, divorce did not free a spouse from the suspicion of the police, which in turn raised the threat of charges of ‘criminal responsibility.’ It is quite likely that the police used this as leverage to threaten her.

What is missing from Anna’s testimony, as from that of Gavriil Belik, is any discussion of Gavriil’s military service. In spite of the fact that at the time of his arrest, his military service card was seized [see p. 24], Anna did not mention Gavriil’s military service, which she would have been aware of had he served in the military. Clearly this was a subject the police interrogators did not want to have discussed. Given how critical the accusation of refusal to bear arms was to the case against Gavriil Belik and other defendants, the avoidance of this issue in interrogation casts serious doubt on the authenticity of Anna’s testimony.

Mariia Zelinskaia

Yet another witness was deposed to incriminate both Liubov’ Fedorchuk and Polina Gavriliuk. Polina Gavriliuk’s neighbour, Mariia Mitrofanova Zelinskaia, 44, was questioned on 17 November by Vетoshkin and Ruset-

skii. Zelinskaia stated that Fedorchuk often visited Gavriliuk – both were ‘Saturdayists.’ Asked to name more ‘Saturdayists,’ she named the Glivaskaia sisters. Zelinskaia added, however, that because she herself was a non-believer and had never asked them about their faith, she did not know what their faith was or what it was called. She was then questioned about whether she knew any ‘anti-Soviet’ sectarian activity of the Saturdayists, to which she responded: ‘I know only that they are sectarians, they don’t work on Saturdays and they don’t eat pork or meat. I don’t know more than that. I know nothing about their anti-Soviet activity.’ When asked whether the Glivaskaias held meetings of sectarians in their house, she said that she did not know because she worked all day (on Saturdays as well) and she did not watch their house. When the interrogators pressed Zelinskaia again to give testimony on the Glivaskaias’ ‘anti-Soviet’ activity, Zelinskaia merely repeated that they did not discuss their faith with her and she did not ask them about it – in any case she was not interested. So she knew nothing about their ‘anti-Soviet’ activity. The only testimony of value the interrogators extracted from her was that Praskov’ia Glivaskaia and Fedorchuk often travelled to some villages. She added, however, that she did not know for what purpose (2:188–92).

Mariia Pilipenko

Not satisfied with Zelinskaia’s testimony, Vetoshkin deposed Mariia Vasil’-evna Pilipenko, 52, the wife of Petr Pilipenko, on the same day, 17 November. She was illiterate, so the only notation on her deposition was ‘An illiterate,’ by her interrogator. She said she was Orthodox and that her husband called himself an ‘Adventist.’ She did not know, however, to what sect he belonged. She only knew that he did not work on Saturdays. Although Vetoshkin pressed Mariia for places where her husband went for prayers, she said she did not know. Vetoshkin then told her to name other Adventists she knew. She said that she knew no one else. Frustrated, Vetoshkin further grilled her about her husband’s ‘anti-Soviet’ activity. But Mariia simply said that she knew nothing about her husband’s ‘anti-Soviet’ activity. She did say, however, that her husband once proposed that she join him in his faith and for this purpose read religious books to her. She refused, however. She said that she had nothing more to add (2:193–5).

Clearly Vetoshkin was irritated by Mariia's apparent unwillingness to incriminate her husband. Was she really ignorant of her husband's religious life? When she was later summoned to the court, she did not even show up! Her one statement about her husband's 'proselytizing activity' (his proposal to her to join his sect) may well have been a police invention. Mariia was illiterate, after all, and did not sign her deposition.

Makar Rudenko

Finally, Makar Mikhailovich Rudenko was deposed as a witness on 22 November by Vetoshkin. Rudenko, 42 years of age, was a supervisor at the weapons storage of the military training centre in the city of Bila Tserkva. His testimony on Gavriil Belik so undermined the police case that it was completely withdrawn from the court and Rudenko himself was not summoned to court.

Rudenko stated that in September 1952 Belik was called up for 20 sessions of military training. Belik and other trainees were lined up in front of the weapons storage, and Rudenko, as its manager, had to hand out rifles and automatic guns. Belik declared in front of the entire ranks, however, that he would not bear arms, because it would violate his religious beliefs and he would not kill anyone with any weapons. Belik was sent to the commanders of the centre. A few days after that incident, Rudenko noted, Belik took part in the training with arms in hand. On Saturdays, however, he did not take part, because, according to him, he could not work and could not be in the training centre. Rudenko believed that the commanders somehow accepted Belik's wishes. Belik did not take part in the training on Saturdays (2:196–8).

Vetoshkin must have been so taken aback by Rudenko's testimony that he had no more questions for the witness. While Belik had managed to observe the Saturday Sabbath with the permission of his military commanders, he had taken part in the military training with arms in hand. So accusations against Belik to the effect that he had refused to serve in the Soviet Army and advocated the same action to others were patently false. The police and the prosecution knew it. For some reason Rudenko's testimony was left in the case file and not removed. Rudenko was not called to testify at the court, for good reason.

The case file contains no subsequent witness records before the thirteen arrests. This does not mean that the police did not depose other witnesses. The witness statements in the case file concern mostly the Glivaskaia sisters, Darovskii, Fedorchuk, Pilipenko, Gavriliuk, Ksenia Belik, and Gavrill Belik. After the thirteen arrests, the police began to build a case against the three suspects from the village of Popravka, Babenko, Il'chenko, and Borzak. This, however, left Arkhip Brovchenko and Vasili Brovchenko out. They were to be indicted without any witness testimonies!

Grigorii Borzak

In any case, on 27 November, the police deposed Grigorii Mikhailovich Borzak, 34, the only Communist Party member that figures in this case file. (Whether he and one of the defendants, Sergei Borzak, were related was not clarified in the case file.) He worked on the collective farm of Popravka as its director. Questioned by Vetoshkin, he testified that there were three ‘Saturdayists’ in the village – Ivan Babenko, Fedora Il’chenko, and Sergei Borzak. He did not know what their faith actually was, but he said he knew that the sect was illegal according to the Soviet laws. In the spring of 1951, when he was the chair of the village soviet, at the request of Bila Tserkva District authorities, he took Ivan Babenko (and other believers from a different sect) to the district soviet administration. In his presence, the district authorities explained to Babenko that his faith was prohibited in the Soviet Union and that he could not hold meetings in his house. Although at the time Babenko promised that he would stop his ‘sectarian activity,’ he continued as before to open his house to Il’chenko and Sergei Borzak. Grigorii Borzak admitted that he did not know what they did in their meetings and that he personally heard no anti-Soviet remarks by the three arrested (2:206–8).

Grigorii Borzak’s testimony is significant: Babenko was on the authorities’ watch list. The question arises: why was Babenko the only one summoned? Since several members of another unnamed sect were also summoned at the same time as Babenko, why were Il’chenko and Sergei Borzak not called as well? Was it because Babenko was suspected of using his house for prayer meetings? As will be discussed later, Babenko likely played a special role in this case.

Irina Borzak

Vetoshkin was busy deposing two more witnesses on the same day, 27 November. He questioned two more Borzaks, both of whom, according to their own admissions, were no relations of the accused Sergei Borzak. Irina L'vovna Borzak, 42, who worked on the Popravka collective farm, was a neighbour of Il'chenko. Vetoshkin asked her what faith Il'chenko professed, to which Borzak replied:

In our village Fedora Il'chenko, Ivan Babenko, and Sergei Borzak (who happens to have the same surname as me) are called Saturdayists, because they don't work on Saturdays. What their faith is I don't know, because it never interested me. As a fellow villager, however, I do know that Fedora Il'chenko and Sergei Borzak got together in the house of Ivan Babenko for prayers. How they prayed and what they did there I don't know. I can't say any more than this.

This ended her deposition (2:209–10). One oddity stands out. Even though, like some other witnesses, she stated that she did not know what the 'Saturdayists' did in meetings, she, apparently confidently, testified that they got together 'for prayers.'

Elena Borzak

The same was true of another witness, whom Vetoshkin deposed on the same day, 27 November. Elena Petrovna Borzak, 50, also worked on the Popravka collective farm. Elena Borzak stated that she was not related to Sergei Borzak and that she was merely his neighbour. Vetoshkin continued:

Q: What faith does Sergei Borzak profess?

A: I don't know exactly what faith he professes, but in our village Borzak, Ivan Babenko, and Fedora Il'chenko are called Saturdayists because owing to their faith they cannot work on Saturdays.

Q: Where do these people meet and what do they do there?

A: After the Patriotic War [Second World War] the Saturdayists met for prayers in the house of Ivan Babenko, but what

they did at such prayers and generally what this faith is I don't know. I can't say more than this.

Then she signed her deposition (2:211–12). Apparently she was confident that they met to pray, but she did not know what they actually did. So her testimony that they met for the sake of prayers is very weak evidence. This, however, did not worry the police in the slightest.

Ignat Babenko

Zeroing in on Babenko, the police first deposed his son and then his granddaughter to prove his illegal sectarian activity. On 21 November, deposed by Vetoshkin, Babenko's son, Ignat Ivanovich Babenko, 44, was questioned:

Q: Has Ivan Babenko ever proposed that you join this sectarian community?

A: I am not a believer, and so he has not urged me to join his sect. Approximately from 1947, however, my daughter Vera Ignatovich Babenko, born in 1934, has been living with my father. So she has been brought up by my father in the spirit of his faith and now my daughter, like my father, doesn't work on Saturdays and lives the same kind of life as my father, Ivan Babenko.

Ignat added that he knew nothing about meetings in his father's house (2:199–201). It is not known who Vera Babenko's mother was or why Vera lived separately from her parent(s).

Vera Babenko

A week later, on 28 November, Vera Babenko, 18, was deposed by Vetoshkin. Vera testified that she had lived with her grandfather during the war (probably because her father was fighting, and possibly her mother was killed, in the war) and after the war until he was arrested. Vetoshkin immediately began to press her:

Q: How do you know of it [his being a Saturdayist]?

A: As I said, *I lived with Ivan Babenko and was brought up from child-*

hood by him in his house, so I know that people of the same faith Sergei Borzak and Fedora Il'chenko came to his house. Polia [Gavriluk?] and Liuba [Fedorchuk?], whose last names I don't know, also came from the city of Bila Tserkva. Ivan Babenko *held prayers in his house* with these people. They read the Word of God, especially the Bible. They particularly studied the Ten Commandments of God and said that one mustn't break them. In other words, one mustn't bear arms to defend the Soviet Union and mustn't work in military factories, because they produce weapons and people work there on Saturdays.

Q: Do you share their views?

A: *Living with Ivan Babenko, I was brought up in the same faith and now I also strictly follow all the Commandments of God.* In the event I'm mobilized to a military factory, I'll refuse to work, because there they produce weapons and ammunitions, which contravenes Christ's Sixth Commandment. Also under no circumstances shall I work, not only at military factories but at any factories on Saturdays.

Apparently satisfied with her testimony, Vetoshkin ended Vera's deposition there (2:202–5).

Vera Babenko's testimony was the most damaging, detailing not only her grandfather's activity but also his faith, which no other witnesses seem to have known clearly. Yet Vera Babenko's testimony is also the most suspicious. Her grandfather explicitly testified that Vera was a member of the sect of Reformed Adventists (see p. 104). If so, why did the police not arrest and indict her along with her grandfather? Instead she was used as a witness against him and eloquently and almost defiantly expounded her attitude towards the Soviet laws. The truthfulness of her testimony has to be taken with a big grain of salt.

Witnesses Unsummoned

On 29 November, the day after Vera Babenko was deposed, Vetoshkin signed a document (which was then approved by Zashchitin) that limited the case to the already arrested fourteen: there was 'not enough material'

to implicate in the case the five people whose involvement had been suspected: Aleksei Saranchuk, Aleksei Matiuchenko, Sergei Belokon' (Vasilii Belokon's son), Praskov'ia Saranchuk, and Antonina Matiuchenko (2:270–70v).

Oddly, there is no record of attempts to collect any evidence against Sergei Belokon', Aleksei Saranchuk, and others, even though they were repeatedly named by many involved in the case. Sergei Belokon' was described by the presbyter of the Seventh-Day Adventist congregation, Noga, as having refused military call-ups and therefore having spent a term in the Gulag. Aleksei Saranchuk was named by Gavriliuk, Praskov'oa Gli-vaskaia, Gavriil Belik, Ivan Babenko, and Matrena Levshchenko (a witness) as an important figure who held prayer meetings in his house. Many other names that cropped up in the investigation (Praskov'ia Saranchuk, Antonina Matiuchenko, Ol'ga Koroza, Tat'iana Kravets, Vasilisa Lykova, Daniil Kirichenko, Iarema Stetsenko, Grigorii Shabel'nik, Anna Kubenko, Vasilisia Tsimval, Fedor Sharaevskii, Efrosiniia Donchenko, Onufrii Koshukh, and others) are missing altogether from the Vetoshkin resolution of 29 November.

How about Vera Babenko? In her testimony, she openly challenged the Soviet laws in observance of divine law. Why was she not indicted along with her grandfather Ivan Babenko? She was old enough to be held fully responsible for her ‘crime.’

The most prominent by its absence is the name of Artem Bridnia, whom Noga alleged to be one of the two leaders of the Reformed Adventists in the city of Bila Tserkva. Bridnia was mentioned by others as well, such as Gavriliuk and Gavriil Belik. Arkhip Brovchenko testified that it was Bridnia who in 1938 created an ‘illegal’ sect of Reformed Adventists in the village of Trushky by splitting from the Seventh-Day Adventist congregation. As it turns out, Bridnia, like Vasilii Belokon', had also been involved in the arrests of Reformed Adventists in Kiev in 1948. He lived in Kiev at the time and associated with its Reformed Adventists. One of the arrested in Kiev described Bridnia’s behaviours as inexplicable (2:137). Like Belokon', he escaped arrest and came to his old nest, Bila Tserkva, where he began to be active as a leader of ‘Reformed Adventists.’ Very likely he was a police plant and someone to be protected at all costs.

Darovskii ♦ versus Borzak

Meanwhile the police conducted a series of confrontations. There were records of nine confrontations in the case file (apart from those at which, as discussed earlier, Vasilii Belokon' refused to speak). The first was between Dem'ian Darovskii and Sergei Borzak. It took place on 24 November and lasted for four and a half hours, from 20:30 to 1:00 the following morning. Darovskii stated that he was 20 years old when he first met Borzak (in 1907) and sang in the Popravka village church choir in which Borzak also sang. Borzak confirmed Darovskii's account. Sin'ko, who conducted the confrontation, questioned Darovskii as to his first encounter with Borzak after the war and the conversation he had with him. Darovskii replied:

After the [Great] Patriotic War [Second World War] I first met Sergei Borzak in the summer of 1951 in the city of Bila Tserkva at a market.

Borzak was standing with Aleksei Matiuchenko. I walked up to him, exchanged greetings, and told him where I had been and what I had been doing for the last few years. After that we started discussing our religious convictions. I said to Borzak and Matiuchenko that I was studying different religious trends such as the Baptists and the Seventh-Day Adventists, but for now I hadn't joined any faith, because I didn't know which was truly Christian.

I said further that recently I had been visiting the legal prayer house of the Seventh-Adventist community in the city of Bila Tserkva by [Vladimir] Noga's invitation.

When I spoke about the Seventh-Day Adventists, Borzak responded immediately that the Seventh-Day Adventists were not true believers of Jesus Christ. To my question, 'Why?' Borzak answered: 'Because they are in cahoots with the Soviet government. Later Borzak explained it to me, and I understood then that true believers of Jesus Christ are those who are not in league with the Soviet government and reject any involvement of the government in the affairs of believers.'

At the end of our conversation it became clear to me from what Borzak said that he and Aleksei Matiuchenko were believers, not the kind that regarded the Soviet government as legitimate, but

those who placed divine law above the Soviet laws.

Before we parted, I discovered where Matiuchenko lived, intending to attend a meeting in his house. He told me his address and we parted ways.

The following Saturday or the Saturday after that (I don't remember clearly) I went to Aleksei Matiuchenko's house, where I also saw Sergei Borzak. This time, Matiuchenko, Borzak, and other believers prayed in my presence. After that I continued to attend illegal meetings. I came to know that this was the illegal sect of Reformed Adventists.

If Darovskii was to be believed, Aleksei Matiuchenko was a central figure of the sect. Nevertheless, the police decided, apparently without any enquiry, that there was not enough material to implicate Matiuchenko. Once again, there are hints of police informants in the case.

At any rate, Borzak confirmed Darovskii's testimony. He agreed that when he heard from Darovskii that he meant to become a Seventh-Day Adventist, Darovskii told him that the Seventh-Day Adventists were in league with the Soviet government and obeyed all Soviet laws, thereby violating the Word of God. At Matiuchenko's house, Darovskii listened to Matiuchenko's prayer, spoke to Borzak as well as other believers, and left. A year later, according to Borzak, he met Darovskii at an 'illegal meeting of Reformed Adventists' in the house of Aleksei Saranchuk in the city of Bila Tserkva. (Saranchuk also seems to have been an important figure, at least according to Borzak's testimony.) After that he did not see Darovskii at any meetings. Asked by Sin'ko whether he had ever visited Darovskii at home, Borzak said he did twice: once he brought over some of his belongings, which he had apparently left somewhere, and another time he stayed overnight at Darovskii's house, but Darovskii was not at home that night. Darovskii confirmed Borzak's account. Neither had more to say (2:213–19).

There is an apparent factual contradiction in their account. Both Darovskii and Borzak admitted that Borzak once stayed overnight in Darovskii's house in his absence. Yet Darovskii's son-in-law Prisiazhniuk, as discussed earlier in this chapter, testified that some old man (clearly Borzak) had once stayed overnight with Darovskii and that they had read religious books together! No one in the police or the prosecutor's office heeded this kind of contradiction in the investigation. (They probably

reasoned that Prisiazhniuk would not have let a stranger stay overnight and that therefore both Borzak and Darovskii had lied.) They did not seem at all concerned about important figures like Matiuchenko and Saranchuk.

If Noga was right, and Sergei Borzak was not accepted into the Seventh-Day Adventist Church because of his sin (adultery), it is unlikely that Borzak was a Reformed Adventist. Why, then, was Borzak, an Adventist of long standing who was convicted in 1914 for refusing to serve in the military, keen to rejoin his old church? Was he in fact a Reformed Adventist and used by the police to inform on the Seventh-Day Adventists, or the other way around?

At any rate, Borzak proved to be the only male defendant who did *not* appeal the verdict. His was also the only case for which no names of witnesses to his crime were noted in the arrest warrant.

Fedorchuk versus Babenko ♦

The following day, 25 November, Gutorov and Rusetskii held a confrontation between Liubov' Fedorchuk and Ivan Babenko for two hours, from 22:00 to 24:00. They acknowledged one another's identity and stated that their relations were 'normal.' Fedorchuk stated that in the winter of 1952 Babenko, whom she regarded as a brother in faith, was taken ill and, accompanied by Polina Gavriliiuk, she visited him. In the summer of 1952 she visited Babenko once by herself. At the time she prayed with him and Fedora Il'chenko at his house. Babenko confirmed her account. They both said that they had nothing more to add (2:224–6). This was all for a two-hour session. It would have taken a mere five or ten minutes to conclude this conversation.

Something else, in fact much more, must have taken place between Fedorchuk and Babenko. This is puzzling because the files suggest that Fedorchuk offered whatever testimonies the interrogators wanted and Babenko was equally compliant. They seem to have disagreed on whether Fedorchuk actually took part in a prayer meeting at Babenko's house, but why Babenko would have disputed her claim is not clear. (Fedorchuk was not mentioned in Babenko's interrogation record.) At any rate, something does not add up here.

Noga versus Gavriliuk

On the same day, Vетoshkin conducted a confrontation between Ivan Noga and Polina Gavriliuk. Noga reported that Gavriliuk had been excommunicated from the Seventh-Day Adventist congregation and had joined the sect of Reformed Adventists. Gavriliuk concurred. And, even though Noga seems not to have alleged so (in any case, how could he have known about it?), Gavriliuk added that she did not deny the fact that she attended illegal meetings in the house of the Glivaskaias (2:227–31).

Gavriliuk versus Pilipenko ♦

Gavriliuk was forced by Zavrik to confront Petr Pilipenko on the same day. Both concurred that they became acquainted with one another in 1947 at a prayer meeting of the Seventh-Day Adventist community in Bila Tserkva and that they were both expelled ('disfellowshipped') from the community for their faith and that they both attended prayer meetings in the house of the Glivaskaia sisters (2:232–4). This session was not short, continuing for three hours and ten minutes, from 20:30 to 23:40. Its record does not reflect such a long session. Whatever actually took place between them is not known. It is quite possible that they had some important disagreements.

Noga versus Fedorchuk

Another confrontation took place on 26 November. Gutorov and Rusetskii placed Ivan Noga and Liubov' Fedorchuk face to face from 14:15 to 16:00. They asked Noga what he knew about the defendant Fedorchuk. Noga replied:

As the former presbyter of the Seventh-Day Adventist community in Bila Tserkva, I know that in 1947 Fedorchuk received water baptism, which I administered, and that until 1949 she was a member of the Adventist community. In 1949 a plenipotentiary of the Seventh-Adventist Church in Ukraine, Iakovenko, sent out a letter to all congregations that the Seventh-Day Adventists, along with all Soviet citizens, were obliged to perform

their military duties and in the event of war take up arms to defend our Motherland. Apart from this, the letter also instructed that if need be, they were obliged to work on Saturdays.

After this letter came, disagreements began to emerge within our congregation. Then Iakovenko himself came to us. He explained in our meeting that the Seventh-Day Adventists were obligated, along with all citizens, to obey all Soviet laws. After this event, most of the congregation stayed with us, but a few, including Liubov' Fedorchuk, disagreed with Iakovenko and left our community. I had the opportunity to converse with her on this matter, but she told me that she disagreed with the decision of the Seventh-Day Adventists and asked me to expel her from our community. In 1949, she was expelled from the Seventh-Day Adventist congregation. This is what I know about Liubov' Fedorchuk.

Two months earlier Noga told the police that all but himself had left the community, which therefore collapsed. Now he said that the majority stayed with him. This was a clear contradiction, but one that was never questioned by the interrogators. Fedorchuk responded that she confirmed in full Noga's testimony (2:220–3).

Fedorchuk versus Il'chenko

According to the case file, on the same day Liubov' Fedorchuk was made to confront Fedora Il'chenko by Subbotin and Rusetskii for three hours, from 14:00 to 17:00. Yet, as just discussed, she was in a confrontation with Noga from 14:15 to 16:00. So if the extant records are correct, she was in two confrontations simultaneously. In any case, according to the file, Fedorchuk was asked whether she knew the woman sitting in front of her. Fedorchuk identified her as a Reformed Adventist sister. They first met in the village of Cherkas in 1947, when there was still a legally operating Seventh-Day Adventist house of prayer. Fedorchuk then joined the Reformed Adventists and began to attend their illegal meetings, which Il'chenko too attended. Fedorchuk visited Il'chenko's house in Popravka and maintained an 'organizational contact' (2:235).

Il'chenko responded to Fedorchuk's testimony by saying that even though she did not remember the 1947 meeting Fedorchuk had just men-

tioned, she came to know her Reformed Adventist sister Fedorchuk well from around 1949 to 1950. She remembered best her encounter with Fedorchuk in 1949 or 1950 in a bazaar in Bila Tserkva, where her brother in faith Vasilii Brovchenko introduced her to Fedorchuk. Since then they had known each other well. It is odd that neither Il'chenko nor Vasilii Brovchenko mentioned the other in their pre-trial interrogations. Now it appears that they did know each other, although how they came to know each other is not explained (2:236).

Fedorchuk then noted that she went to Popravka for prayer meetings twice in the winter and in the summer of 1952. The first time she accompanied Gavriliuk but no meeting was held, because Babenko was ill. In the summer of 1952 she took part in a secret prayer meeting in Babenko's house, which Babenko led. His granddaughter Vera (at the time 15 or 16 years of age) was there, as were Il'chenko and someone whom she did not know (2:237). Oddly, in her testimony Vera Babenko did not mention Fedora Il'chenko (but she mentioned 'Liuba,' most likely Liubov' Fedorchuk, and 'Polia,' probably Polina Gavriliuk) as having attended a meeting at Babenko's house. So here one detects another subtle contradiction. This confrontation produced additional problems instead of resolving one. This is probably because at least a part of the testimonies was contrived by the police (2:238).

Praskov'ia Glivaskaia versus Ksenia Belik

On 26 November, Praskov'ia Glivaskaia and Ksenia Belik were made to confront each other by Sin'ko and Rusetskii. Belik identified the woman facing her as Praskov'ia Glivaskaia and stated that she had attended an 'illegal meeting' in her house in the summer of 1952. Glivaskaia confirmed Belik's statement. As noted earlier, Ksenia Belik's confession that she had once attended a meeting in Glivaskaia's house was given without any context (see p. 82), and the history of Belik's acquaintance with her was never clarified. It simply did not seem to interest the interrogators. Asked for the purpose of the meeting, Ksenia Belik spoke rather eloquently:

In the city of Bila Tserkva there is an anti-Soviet sectarian organization of Reformed Adventists who strictly follow the Ten Commandments of the Lord God. Since we members of the

organization of Reformed Adventists oppose the Soviet laws on questions of military service and working on Saturdays, it was decided that we Reformists advocate our views openly. Therefore we took turns and met in our members' houses and prayed. The purpose of the meeting in Glivaskaia's house in which I took part was the same.

Glivaskaia confirmed Belik's account: 'Yes, I confirm fully the statements of the defendant Ksenia Belik, because we held illegal meetings in order to hide our prayers from the organs of the Soviet government and strengthen our faith.' They read the Bible and Ellen G. White's *The Great Controversy* in the meetings. Then she added:

We interpreted all these writings in an anti-Soviet spirit. The Word of God demanded that we not submit ourselves to the laws of the government. We used these writings to understand what 'Satan' is and whether one can kill in the event of war: no, we have to love all people, including our enemies. We convinced one another and strengthened our conviction that we mustn't work in military factories, we mustn't transgress the Fourth Commandment of the Lord God and we mustn't work on Saturdays.

Belik concurred: 'By reading these books and discussing them in an anti-Soviet spirit, we strengthened our belief that we were taking the right path shown by the Lord God' (2:239–43).

This must have been a very good confrontation from the point of view of the police. It gave them what they needed: mutual admissions of collective anti-Soviet activity.

Praskov'ia Glivaskaia versus Gavriil Belik ♦

Further, on the same day (26 November) Vetoshkin and Rusetskii confronted Gavriil Belik with Praskov'ia Glivaskaia. She identified Belik and stated that he had attended prayer meetings in her house. Gavriil confirmed Glivaskaia's statement (2:244–5).

Sekletina Glivaskaia versus Vasili Brovchenko ♦

The last confrontation took place on the same day, 26 November, between Sekletina Glivaskaia and Vasili Brovchenko, the youngest defendant in the

present case. Earlier Glivaskaia had testified that she had known Vasilii's father Arkhip since 1935 or 1936. Now, questioned by Gutorov and Rusetskii, Glivaskaia stated that their association continued throughout the war years as well. She did not remember exactly when, but during the occupation, Vasilii and his father visited them in the village of Trushky for prayers. She also visited the Brovchenkos' house for the same reason. Vasilii Brovchenko confirmed her statements and signed the written record of the confrontation. The illiterate Sekletina Glivaskaia did not sign it. The interrogators instead noted simply that Glivaskaia was illiterate (2:246–8).

This concluded the pre-trial investigation of the present case. Except for Vasilii Belokon', everyone confessed to the alleged crimes of conducting 'anti-Soviet' propaganda and agitation and belonging to the illegal sect of Reformed Adventists. Belokon', the supposed leader of the sect in the Bila Tserkva region, posed the most serious problem for the police, because of his refusal to speak. How common such a refusal was is difficult to know. Judging by what is known about the brutal practice of Soviet justice, it was probably rather rare. In the end, however, this did not prevent the police from prosecuting him. They took his silence as a tacit proof of his guilt. The other thirteen defendants and about as many witnesses provided *prima facie* evidence of the alleged crimes.

From the records of the investigation it appears that the defendants or at least most of them chose not to work on Saturdays because of their faith. They found practical solutions for their choice by dint of, say, not working for offices and factories that obliged them to work on Saturdays or choosing not to work at all for any employer (so some defendants were described in the case file as having no steady job at all) or finding an accommodating employer or work supervisor. These solutions were not illegal. For not working on Saturdays, they were called 'Saturdayists.' It is not difficult to imagine that they would have known each other for some time as adherents of the same belief. Some were former Seventh-Day Adventists. During the German occupation, when the Soviet government disappeared and the occupation policy towards religion was anti-Soviet and pro-religion, they probably prayed together, as Sekletina Praskov'ia stated. After the war, some of them continued to visit each other.

Beyond this, everything becomes much less clear. It is possible and even likely that some of them wanted their spouses to understand their beliefs and even accept them. This would not have constituted religious propaganda or agitation if marriage were assumed to be sacred. Yet that was not the case in Stalin's Soviet Union, where spouses were obliged to inform on one another, and advocating one's faith was considered proselytism. However, such depositions by spouses need to be read with utmost caution. Even the Soviet secret police dared not confront a husband and wife. Their emotional bonds might unpredictably help them to rise above their fears, making a mess of an elaborately contrived scheme by the police.

The question of organized contact among the arrested is even less clear. The police were intent on demonstrating that the accused lived as a religious community, a sect: they met as an organization and pursued specific goals – spreading their faith and mutually strengthening their beliefs. The police reasoned that these believers lived clandestinely and that, consequently, it was difficult to obtain evidence of their actual activity. Many witnesses indeed failed to provide evidence of it. None or very few even seemed to know the 'official' name (Reformed Adventist) of the sect. Yet this fact probably underscored to the police the underground nature of their 'sectarian' activity. Under pressure (more accurately, under duress), all the arrested but Belokon' confessed to their 'illicit' faith and 'clandestine' activities.

As long as faith remained metaphysical, the police work was comparatively easy, because the evidence of illicit belief could be metaphysical too. Yet when faith demanded action, the question of evidence became much more complex, for actions were not metaphysical. Collecting evidence that the arrested did not work on Saturdays was easy, because their actions were visible to everyone. Yet the police had to find evidence that they actually refused to perform military duties. It was this question that tested the police investigation.

Of course, one's declaration that he or she would refuse to serve in the Soviet Army or work in military factories provided sufficient ground for prosecution under Soviet conditions. When questioned by the police, all but Belokon' declared to this effect, some very eloquently and movingly, at least according to their interrogation records. Moreover, there are individuals who had earlier been prosecuted for their refusal to serve. Borzak's 'criminal record' as a conscientious objector dated back to the

pre-revolutionary years. Although Darovskii served in three different armies (of the tsarist government, the 1917 provisional government, and the Soviet government), his arrests before the Second World War (in 1934 and 1937) were related to his religious faith. (So he sat out the war in the Gulag.) As will be seen, in 1940 Gavrill Belik was a conscientious objector, for which he served a term (and for this reason he, like Darovskii, sat out the war in the Gulag).

Yet the police investigations left the most critical evidence out. The police, for example, seized Belik's military service card, a significant piece of material evidence. This meant that Belik must have served in the military at one point in his life. Indeed, he did, as the witness Makar Rudenko, who worked at the military training centre in the city of Bila Tserkva, testified. But this fact was not brought up in the interrogation of Belik and his wife. (Or, if it was brought up, the record was suppressed.) Equally oddly, the police went so far as to declare that there was not enough evidence to arrest Sergei Belokon', the son of the alleged ringleader of the sect, Artem Bridnia, Aleksei Saranchuk, and others who were repeatedly named in the interrogation.

Equally oddly, the case file contains absolutely no records of self-defence that pacifists normally use: because they refuse to take arms, they pose no threat to the regime.

The police suppressed the evidence and obfuscated their investigation where it mattered most. No one, even the defence lawyers of the accused, dared to raise these issues. True, there was plenty of *prima facie* evidence. The case appeared very strong and may have appeared to some people to be nearly perfect. In the end, the case would prove to have been faked.

6 The Trial

I do not know what effect
my accusers have had upon you, gentlemen,
but for my own part I was almost carried away by them;
their arguments were so convincing.
On the other hand, scarcely a word of what they said was true.

Socrates¹

UNLIKE JOSPEH K.'S CASE in Kafka's *The Trial*, the process of prosecuting the arrested Adventists in Bila Tserkva progressed very rapidly. Confessions were taken from all but Belokon' about their 'anti-Soviet' faith and activity. To what extent the police and the prosecutors were concerned about loose ends in their investigations is unclear. The police may have rationalized that in any case all the loose ends could not be tied up and that these clandestine believers, 'enemies' of the Soviet government, would never confess entirely: such submission to an atheist regime would have gone against their souls. Once important confessions were extracted, the police did not waste any time.

Some of the inconsistencies and contradictions examined in the previous chapters did surface during the trial. Yet the defence counsel did nothing to question them. Even though at the trial some bombshells were dropped by the accused, the court took no notice of them. There were even dramatic turns of events, too. For instance, at the start of the trial, reversing their pre-trial positions, all the defendants (but Belokon') pleaded *not guilty*. Yet this had no effect on the verdict. Clearly the guilt of the accused was predetermined.

Preparations for Trial

On 30 November, the police presented two volumes of their case file, totalling 592 leaves (both sides of most leaves were filled), to all the fourteen

¹'The Apology of Socrates' in Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Harmondsworth, 1959), 45.

arrested. They were told that the pre-trial investigations were complete and they were asked to sign a document that they had familiarized themselves with the case file. All but Belokon' signed the document. They noted in writing that they had nothing to add to their testimonies and that they had no petition to submit. Belokon', as before, refused to answer any questions and refused to sign the document (2:273–87).

Given that the fourteen had only one day to read the 592 pages of the case file, and that two of them were illiterate and some of them read with difficulty, it is fair to assume that this procedure was mere pro forma. In fact, there is no evidence that a copy of the file was even produced. After all, the file was almost entirely recorded in longhand. The arrested could not have read it all. Or, resigned to their fate, they may not have bothered. Obviously, the formality of the process mattered, but its substance did not.

On 8 December 1952, in the city of Kiev, the bill of indictment was completed by Vetoshkin and the chief of the Investigation Department of the MGB in Kiev Oblast', Razumnyi. Zashchitin then approved the draft.

The bill of indictment was approved by Martynenko, the MGB officer in Kiev, on 9 December. For thirteen of the arrested, the process from arrest to prosecution was a speedy one, taking only three weeks. For Belokon' it was expedited in less than two weeks. According to the indictment, 'in essence' all of the arrested pled guilty to the crimes of which they were accused (2:288–309).

Meanwhile, the secret police collected the testimony of the deputy director of the religious affairs administration in Kiev Oblast', Bitebskii. In a note addressed to Vetoshkin, Bitebskii stated that he had examined all 23 books and notebooks seized by the police and submitted for expert assessment. Most were published in Kiev and Moscow in 1927–8 or hand-copied from them. All, according to Bitebskii,

preach a fallacious world view that clouds the consciousness of people: the need to serve God and obey exploiters. They also preach obscurantism and politically harmful doctrines. For instance, in the collection of essays consisting of the chapters 'Christian Abstinence' and 'The Creation,' it is written: 'Christians must pray for all that are in authority (page 111, Chapter The Creation).'²

²This seems to refer to 1 Timothy 2:1–2 of the New Testament: 'I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all

In this chapter, the author, based on militaristic convictions, writes: ‘This intensified preparation for war is an unconscious fulfilment of prophecy’ (page 115).

On page 47 of the chapter ‘Abstinence’ and on pages 151, 152, 155 of the chapter ‘The Creation,’ the author propagates an American style of life: the USA is ‘the defender of Christianity. The Christian religion . . . is the true religion of the United States.’

It turned out that the prosecution wanted to indict as ‘pacifists’ those whom Bitebskii accused of supporting ‘militaristic convictions’!

Bitebskii’s farce continued: ‘In the notebook, “The Awakening of Reform among the Seventh-Day Adventists: Signs of Our Time,” published in 1922 in San Francisco, it is written: “The last hour will ring shortly on our earth, the entire world has gotten lost in all walks of life – industry, social and religious, a complete chaos reigns.”’ Bitebskii concluded his assessment by noting that ‘all the books and notebooks propagate obviously politically harmful ideas. All these materials are ideologically damaging and alien to the Marxist-Leninist world view’ (2:532).

On the following day, the assistant prosecutor of special cases of Kiev Oblast’, A. Lednikova (who appeared earlier in the interrogation of Fedorchuk), signed the bill and sent it to the chairman of the Kiev Oblast’ Court, Glushchenko (2:310–11). Next day, on 11 December, a preparatory session of the Court collegium, chaired by Glushchenko and attended by two judges, Afonina and Zagorodniuk, and Lednikova, took place. Lednikova asked the collegium to approve the bill of indictment and hold the trial in camera, with the participation of ‘both sides’ (namely, prosecutors and defence lawyers). Lednikova’s request was approved by the collegium (2:312–13).

The Indictment

The bill of indictment, unlike almost all other documents in the present case file, was typed (2:288–309). This was because it had to be cleared with higher-ups in Kiev (and possibly in Moscow as well). The indict-

men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.’

ment provided detailed biographical data of all fourteen defendants and their alleged crimes. According to articles 54-10, part 2, and 54-11 of the criminal code of the Ukrainian Socialist Republic (see p. 53), the fourteen were charged with conducting 'anti-Soviet' agitation and propaganda and being members of an 'anti-Soviet' organization. This illegal 'anti-Soviet' organization, a sect of Reformed Adventists, according to the indictment, was created in 1949 by the 'cadre member' of the Reformed Adventist underground, Vasilii Belokon', and operated in the city of Bila Tserkva and its surrounding villages and consisted of fourteen 'most active' adherents. The bill maintained that Belokon' joined the Reformed Adventist underground in the village of Mohylivka, Vinnytsia Oblast', in 1932. He worked in post-occupation Kiev in 1944-6, where he recruited members. These members were arrested in 1946, but he escaped arrest.

'Belokon' then went underground and created a new sectarian group in Bila Tserkva and its nearby villages. 'Polina Gavriliuk, Petr Pilipenko, Liubov' Fedorchuk, Ivan Babenko, Praskov'ia Glivaskaia, and others' were said to have 'carried out anti-Soviet activities' aimed at breaking up the legally operating congregations of Seventh-Day Adventists by recruiting their members into the 'anti-Soviet underground' of Reformed Adventists. The indictment alleged that the members of the Reformed Adventist sect refused to accept the decision of the 1928 Congress of Seventh-Day Adventists that took place in Moscow: the congress obliged all Seventh-Day Adventists to acknowledge the Soviet government as legitimate and lawful, to serve in the Red Army along with all other citizens of the country, and to bear arms in defence of the country. Rejecting this decision, the accused stood against the Soviet government and spread their illicit faith to the neighbouring villages, where they recruited approximately 30 people into their sect. Moreover, they 'systematically' held illegal prayer meetings at which they read sermons of an 'anti-Soviet nature.' They indoctrinated new recruits in the spirit of hate and hostility towards the Soviet government and preached to them the so-called 'Lessons of Reform.'

The indictment alleged that 'a large quantity of anti-Soviet sectarian literature' was seized from all the accused at the time of their arrests that they had duplicated by hand and distributed. At the very least, the phrase 'from all the accused' was clearly a blatant lie. Such literature was in fact compounded from *some* of the arrested, but far from all of them (no

literature was recorded as impounded from Vasili Browchenko, Gavriil Belik, and Darovskii, and the illiterate Il'chenko).

Fourteen witnesses were listed, all of whom were questioned at the pre-trial investigation stage (2:308–9). As discussed in the previous chapter, however, no witnesses were called against two of the defendants, Vasili Browchenko and his father Arkhip.

On 12 December, all the accused were presented with the bill of indictment. It is not known whether they actually read it. Nor is it known whether it was read to those who could not read because they were illiterate. All, except for Belokon', the illiterate Sekletina Glivaskaia, and Il'chenko, signed that they had familiarized themselves with the bill. Belokon' refused to sign (2:314–28).

Now the stage was set for trial.

The Trial: Day One

The trial of the fourteen accused opened in the city of Bila Tserkva, Kiev Oblast', at 13:00 on Monday 15 December 1952. It continued into the evening with a break. The trial resumed at 10:00 on the following day and closed at 20:00 on that day, 16 December. The proceedings were recorded longhand. The trial itself appears to have been pro forma, with no substantive examination of the accused or the witnesses or the evidence of the alleged crimes. The records are strikingly short, consisting of only 35 folios written on both sides (2:331–65v).

The trial session opened with the announcement of the court staff (the judges, the prosecution, the defence lawyers, and the defendants). The judges were Glushchenko and two 'people's assessors' (*narodnye zasедатели*), Petrenko and Potrebsniak.³ The prosecution team was headed by Rusetskii. The defence were represented by Perel'muter and Kozlov, the former representing Gavriil Belik, Darovskii, Fedorchuk, Babenko, Vasili Browchenko, Arkhip Browchenko, and Il'chenko, the latter Praskov'ia Glivaskaia, Seklina Glivaskaia, Pilipenko, Ksenia Belik, Borzak, Gavriliuk, and Belokon'. In addition, the court clerk (secretary), Kopanova, was

³ People's assessors were lay judges who were nominally elected by the people, but actually appointed by Soviet authorities. They took part in the court and assisted the chief judge.

in charge of keeping the records of the trial. No objection to the judges was raised. Then the witnesses were introduced to the court: Manuil Prisiazhniuk, Matrena Levshchenko, Mariia Stasiuk, Mariia Zelinskaia, Vera Babenko, Irina Borzak, Grigorii Borzak, Ivan Noga, Anna Belik, and Vladimir Chumachenko. Missing were Rudenko, Mariia Pilipenko (the wife of the defendant Petr Pilipenko), Elena Borzak, and Ignat Babenko (the son of the defendant Ivan Babenko). All the witnesses were for the prosecution. The defence lawyers summoned no witnesses, probably because they were not allowed to. The witnesses present at the court were then warned against perjury as stipulated in article 89 of the criminal code.⁴ After that, they were dismissed from the court until called upon.

The presiding judge then explained to the defendants their procedural rights in the court of trial (exactly what constituted these rights was not recorded), after which he enquired of the prosecution and the defence whether the court could proceed without the presence of the witnesses who had not reported. (The absent witnesses may have been ill. Possibly, Mariia Pilipenko and Ignat Babenko refused to give testimonies against their family members. More likely, the police deemed them unreliable and unpredictable in the presence of the accused and secretly chose not to call them to the trial. Certainly, the testimony of Rudenko would have destroyed the indictment against Gavriil Belik. Almost certainly he was not called to the court.) The prosecution argued in favour of beginning the hearing of the case, leaving the question of absent witnesses for later in the court session. The defence concurred (2:334).

The refusal of the defendant Vasilii Belokon' to speak presented a difficult problem to the court. The judge asked the prosecution and the defence what to do with him. The prosecution suggested that the court should proceed: he was present in the court room and it was his right to give or not give testimony to the court. (It is not known whether the judges told the defendants that they also had the right not to speak.) The defence agreed. No other objection or petition was entered. So the prosecution then read the bill of indictment (2:334–4v).

⁴Article 89 stipulated that ‘a knowingly false testimony given by a witness, expert or an interpreter in the inquiry, interrogation or court hearing of a given case shall be punishable by deprivation of liberty for a term up to six months.’ *Ugolovnyi kodeks Ukrainskoi SSR. Ofitsial’nyi tekst s izmeneniami na 10 okt. 1954 g. i s prilozheniem postateino-sistematisirovannykh materialov* (Moscow, 1954), 35–6.

After the indictment was read, the defendants were asked whether they would plead guilty. Here, the trial took a surprising about-face. Reversing their pre-trial guilty pleas, all the accused but Belokon' (who refused to answer) pleaded '*not guilty* on the grounds of their religious convictions'! Each of them, save Belokon', declared, however, that they understood of what they were accused and wished to give testimonies (2:335–5v).

No record exists in the case file that so much as hints at how the court reacted in the face of these astounding not-guilty pleas. Did the accused change their minds on the advice of their defence lawyers? Or did they marshal enough courage to stand up at the trial (even though it was a closed court)? Although there is no explanation at all in the case file, one can well understand why the court was held *in camera*.⁵ The police and the prosecution must have been concerned that unexpected twists and turns might occur, stymying the prosecution, and therefore decided on a closed court. (Such twists and turns would have spelt disaster in an open, public court.) The presence of Belokon', who refused to speak, was a big headache to boot.

Whatever in fact happened, the trial records show that the court proceeded as if nothing untoward had occurred. The judge enquired of the prosecution and the defence what the procedure would be. The prosecution proposed that the accused be heard first and then the witnesses. The defence did not object (2:336).

Fedora Il'chenko was the first to testify. As discussed earlier, her defiantly 'anti-Soviet' stance had made her appear almost heroic in the interrogation. The choice of her as the first to put on the stand, probably made by the prosecution, was thus not accidental. Her testimony at the trial closely resembled her earlier one to the interrogators:

I've been an adherent of the sect of Reformed Adventists since 1938. Before that I belonged to the sect of Seventh-Day Adventists.

I'm firmly convinced by the teaching of this sect [of Reformed Adventists]. I strive to follow strictly the Ten Commandments and the Word of Jesus Christ. I don't work on Saturdays, I can't kill anyone, because the Word of God says, 'Love your enemies.'

⁵I have not been able to examine local newspapers. The Kiev newspapers I have perused carried no report on this closed trial, at least at the time.

Owing to my religious convictions, I have no enemies. All people on earth are my brethren. I can't kill anyone, so I can't work in military factories. I refuse to render any assistance to the Soviet government in strengthening the military might of the country, because to do so contravenes divine law.

On the grounds of our religious convictions, we cannot take up arms or serve in the Soviet Army, because by doing so we would violate the Sixth Commandment.

It appears that at this point the prosecution wanted to nail her down as a dangerous 'anti-Soviet' provocateur. Exactly what the prosecution asked was not recorded, whereas Il'chenko's answer was:

I recognize only the divine authority to which I submit myself.

The Soviet government I recognize as legitimate, and I follow its laws, only insofar as they don't violate divine law.

We met for prayers in the house of Ivan Babenko. Sergei Borzak joined us.

At this point, her defence lawyer, Perel'muter, intervened with a question. This question, too, was not recorded, but Il'chenko's answer was:

Neither my husband nor my daughter is an adherent of this sect. My son is serving in the Soviet Army. I didn't work on the collective farm because of an illness. I know that the sect of Reformed Adventists is banned by the Soviet government.

Her testimony so far must have been satisfactory to the prosecution. (That her not working on the collective farm was due to her illness was a rather abrupt statement seemingly made out of context. This probably means that she was accused of not working, that is, being an idler, and wanted to set the record straight.). Therefore, Rusetskii asked whether she pleaded guilty to the crimes of which she was accused. Il'chenko now appeared to recant the not-guilty plea she had given at the beginning of the trial: 'I plead guilty of the fact that I cannot obey the Soviet laws owing to my religious convictions.' Rusetskii then read the part of her interrogation records in which she pleaded guilty of the indictment presented to her on 24 November, asking her whether she would confirm it. She answered in the affirmative. She then implicated Belokon':

The defendant Belokon' and I met at prayer meetings, but I didn't know his surname. We gathered illegally on Saturdays

in the house of Ivan Babenko. Babenko, Sergei Borzak, and I prayed together. We read sermons with an anti-Soviet content. I have always observed and will continue to observe to the end of my [earthly] days the Ten Commandments of the Lord God and will never renounce them.

With this Il'chenko's testimony ended (2:336v–7v).

Il'chenko's stance set the tone for the remainder of the trial. That was probably the prosecution's intent. Even so, a perusal of the court records reveals inconsistencies and contradictions between what must have been a script to which the defendants were expected to adhere and the actual testimonies given by them at the court. It is almost certain that the prosecution did not expect that the defendants would plead *not guilty*, after all (save Belokon') had pleaded guilty at the interrogation stage.

More unexpected or unscripted remarks crept into the trial records. Gavril Belik, for example, dropped what must have been a bomb shell. This might have been expected, given that he had earlier had the courage to refuse to sign the protocol of confrontation with the witness Levshchenko, whose testimony he emphatically denied (see p. 111). Unlike Il'chenko, Belik made no opening statement, according to the court records. He merely answered the prosecution's question (which itself was not recorded):

In 1940 I was summoned to the organ of the MGB of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic [in Kiev], where I testified that owing to my religious convictions, I would not serve in the Soviet Army [then called the Red Army] and bear arms. Even were it necessary, I said I could not kill anyone, because I could not violate the Sixth Commandment: 'Thou shalt not kill.'

For this, I was convicted in 1940 and served a term until the autumn of 1945.

Belik did not say that he was a Reformed Adventist in 1940. Born in 1920, he was too young to have known first-hand the schism of the 1920s. In the 1930s, Adventism, Reformist or not, came close to extinction in the Soviet Union. It is therefore likely that in 1940 Belik and his father had no formal ties to any Adventist group. Like Petr Pilipenko, they might privately have held traditional, pre-schism Adventist beliefs. If so, it makes sense that his mother, Ksenia, testified earlier (see p. 82) that Gavril became an 'Adventist-Subbotnik' in 1950 when he presumably began to visit legally operating Adventist meetings. This is confirmed by his testimony:

In 1946 I came to Bila Tserkva.

In 1950 I began to visit prayer meetings of the Seventh-Day Adventists.

There I got acquainted with Artem Bridnia. He invited me to his house and in a conversation with me he explained that he and his adherents didn't agree with the Seventh-Day Adventists regarding the military question: they were Reformed Adventists strictly observing the Commandment 'Thou shalt not kill.'

After this I stopped going to the Seventh-Day Adventist meetings and began to share the views of the Reformed Adventists.

Artem Bridnia was the man who recruited Belik into the illegal sect of Reformed Adventists. The court, however, did not heed this inconvenient mention of Bridnia, because Bridnia was likely a police agent (see p. 122).

So far Belik did not ruffle the prosecution very much. Like Il'chenko, he went on to declare that he could not serve in the Soviet Army and take up arms and that he would not kill anyone because he had no enemies on earth.

The court, however, recorded one astonishing statement by Belik. The pre-trial interrogation of Belik and his wife Anna carefully avoided Belik's actual military service. At this point, however, it appears that Gavriil Belik had the courage to bring up this suppressed information: 'In 1952 I was called up for retraining as someone obligated to military duties.' This means that by 1952 Belik had come to terms with his religious beliefs and served in the military. (Because he spoke of 'retraining,' he must have served before the retraining call-up as well. As it turned out, he indeed underwent military training in 1950.) His declaration threatened to destroy the prosecution's case.

The prosecution must have reacted immediately. Belik probably testified that he fulfilled his duties by taking up arms, although it is not recorded in the trial records. No doubt faced with the threatening countenance of the prosecutors, Belik backpedalled: 'On Saturdays I didn't go to training, I didn't bear arms, because I devoted Saturdays to God following my religious convictions.' This seems to have been a concession on Belik's part to the prosecution, but a far cry from the picture of Belik the Reformed Adventist which the prosecution had presented to the court. Whether this caused a commotion is not recorded. The court most likely passed it by as if it were no more than an insignificant aside.

Belik made further concessions by stating that the ‘illegal literature’ of the Reformed Adventists and the Bible seized from him at the time of his arrest did belong to him. He had acquired the Bible in 1951 and copied by hand the brochure *The Awakening of Reform among the Seventh-Day Adventists*, originally published in San Francisco in 1922 (2:338–8v).

Darovskii took the stand after Gavriil Belik. Like Belik, Darovskii made no opening statement. He began his testimony in response to a question by the prosecution:

In 1934, I was indicted according to article 54-10 and sentenced to three years in the Gulag. I served the term and returned to the village of Potiivka. In 1937 I was once again indicted by the [NKVD] Special Board according to article 54-10, part 2 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and sentenced to ten years of confinement. I served this term as well and then came to Bila Tserkva.

In 1947, I began to visit the prayer meetings of Seventh-Day Adventists.

When I realized that the members of this community don’t follow the Commandments strictly, deviating from the Fourth and Sixth, namely [not] working on Saturdays and [not] serving in the Soviet Army, I stopped going to the meetings at the end of 1951. I joined the illegal sect of Reformed Adventists. I closely follow all the Ten Commandments and will never transgress them.

If I were fired upon and told, ‘It’s either freedom or death,’ I’d choose death. I won’t violate divine law.

I acknowledge only the divine authority and submit myself to it alone. I know no other authority and won’t submit to any other than divine authority.

According to the court records, Darovskii appears to have followed the prosecution script faithfully, with no deviation from it (2:339–40).

In fact, as will be discussed in the following chapter, this was not the case. The court simply did not record his testimony faithfully, omitting that which it did not like.

After Darovskii, Borzak took the stand. Like the others, he admitted that he stood against taking up arms in defence of the Soviet government on the grounds that he had no enemies. In response to a question put by

the prosecution, he said, 'I plead guilty, because I stand opposed to the Soviet laws by dint of my religious convictions.' Yet when responding to his defence lawyer Kozlov (whose question is not recorded), Borzak, probably marshalling some courage, contradicted his earlier confession by denying the charges of religious recruitment: 'I've been a collective farmer since 1926. I have a grandson as my dependent. My father died at the front [probably during the First World War]. I didn't recruit anyone into the sect of Reformed Adventists and I didn't impose my views on anyone.' Initially at the interrogation stage he denied having recruited anyone into the sect. Subsequently he admitted having recruited Darovskii. Yet now at the trial he again denied having recruited anyone into the sect (1:340v–1). There is no sign that the court heeded this or any other contradictions.

Ivan Babenko's testimony ensued immediately after Borzak's. Babenko appeared not to deviate from his pre-trial confessions. He stated that in 1948 he joined the illegal sect of Reformed Adventists and that he had no enemies because he considered all people on earth his brethren. Therefore he could not take up arms to kill his brethren; to do so would violate the Sixth Commandment. Owing to their observance of the Sixth Commandment, they, Reformed Adventists, stood against serving in the Soviet Army. When asked by the prosecution, he recanted the plea of innocence he gave at the beginning of the trial and returned to the guilty plea he had given at the pre-trial investigations: he now pleaded guilty of the charges 'in full' (2:341v–2v).

Little in his testimony suggests that he was a key figure in this case, at least in the village of Popravka, even though, as implied earlier, he probably was. From the prosecution's point of view, Babenko's testimony had to be convincing for the case to stand. Babenko, according to the trial records, did not betray the prosecution's expectations.

Gavriliuk's testimony was likewise smooth. Even so, it was not devoid of inconsistencies:

I joined the Seventh-Day Adventist sect in 1947 and attended its meetings until 1949.

In 1949 I left the sect because it violated the two Commandments of divine law: the Fourth and the Sixth ('Thou shalt not kill'). I disagreed with the sect and joined the sectarian organization of Reformed Adventists.

Then in response to the prosecution's question (which is not recorded):

I journeyed to the villages of Matiushi, Shamraivka, and Popravka and preached the Word of God . . .

Following strictly the Sixth Commandment of divine law ('Thou shalt not kill'), we can't serve in the Soviet Army or work at military factories, because we have no enemies, all people on earth are our brethren.

Yet this evidently belied the following statement: 'We consider our enemies all those who don't believe in the Word of God, but we pray for them, too.' Immediately after she stated that there were no enemies on earth, she insisted that those who didn't share her faith (i.e. the Communists) were her enemies! Gavriluk went on to admit that she had copied 'illegal' religious literature and reiterated familiar statements made by other defendants:

The notebook on *The Lessons of Divine Law* I copied by hand at the request of Matiushenko and Pilipenko.

We didn't go to theatres or cinemas, because to do so would have broken our religious convictions.

I recognize the Soviet government and its laws as legitimate within the limits of my religious convictions.

With Gavriluk's testimony the court adjourned for a break (2:343–3v).

After the intermission, Fedorchuk took the stand. She followed Gavriluk's testimony rather closely. She stated that she recognized the Soviet laws only insofar as they did not contravene divine law. She admitted to taking part twice in meetings in Babenko's house as well as possessing 'illegal' religious literature. Like Il'chenko and Praskov'ia Glivaskaia, Fedorchuk implicated Belokon' as the leader of their sect whom she had met at prayer meetings at the Glivaskaias' and Babenko's homes. Regarding the obligation of defending the Soviet Union against external aggressors, Fedorchuk, who spent the years of the German occupation in her native village in Zhytomyr Oblast', said: 'I didn't consider the German [occupiers] my enemies. They did nothing bad to me.'

After she insisted that she had no enemies on earth, Fedorchuk, like Gavriluk, maintained that she considered the atheists her enemies, in other words, she declared that the atheist (Soviet) government and the Communists were her enemies. Quite likely, this was a declaration scripted for her. Asked by the prosecution whether she pleaded guilty to the crimes



Figure 6.1: Religious literature as exhibited at the trial (1)

with which she was charged, she averred ‘in full’ the pre-trial confessions she had given to the police and pleaded guilty to not submitting to the Soviet laws because she followed only divine law (2:344–4v).

Pilipenko did not make any statement but merely answered the questions of the prosecution:

I was brought up by my parents in the spirit of the Seventh-Day Adventist teaching. I joined the sect in 1923. In 1949 I left the legal Seventh-Day Adventist sect, because it had taken a resolution that permitted its members to serve in the Soviet Army and take up arms in defence of the country just as all other Soviet citizens did. With this decision I disagreed and joined the illegal sect of Reformed Adventists.

Then his lawyer Kozlov asked him a question to which he responded: ‘I have a twelve-year-old son. My wife is not an adherent of the sect of Reformed Adventists. She’s not a believer’ (2:345–5v). Like Babenko, Pilipenko appeared to have been resigned to whatever fate awaited him.



Figure 6.2: Religious literature as exhibited at the trial (2). Framed in the centre is a plaque that reads: ‘As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord’ (Joshua 24:15).

Nor did the Glivaskaia sisters disturb the court by particularly unexpected testimonies. Sekletina, in particular, faithfully toed the line of the prosecution. Yet Sekletina reverted to her initial testimony that she joined the Reformed Adventist sect in 1949, not in the 1930s as she subsequently confessed in her pre-trial interrogations (2:347–7v). Praskov’ia started her testimony responding to a question from the prosecution (which is not recorded):

Until 1949 I lived in the village of Matiushi with my sister Sekletina Glivaskaia. We were members of the religious sect of Seventh-Day Adventists.

In 1949 we moved to live in the city of Bila Tserkva, where we didn’t visit the Seventh-Day Adventists congregation, because the members of the congregation didn’t follow the divine commandments correctly and deviated from the Fourth and the Six Commandments.

I then joined the illegal sect of Reformed Adventists.

Members of this sect met in my house for prayers. Sekletina Glivaskaia, Fedorchuk, Gavriliuk, Darovskii, Pilipenko, and I prayed together.

This seemingly straightforward testimony revealed a striking contradiction that went unremarked at the court. In the pre-trial investigation (see p. 76), Praskov'ia had testified that she joined the Reformed Adventist sect in 1929 (because the Soviet government forced her to work on Saturdays), whereas at the trial she stated that until 1949 she was an adherent of the Seventh-Day Adventist sect and only in 1949 did she join the Reformed Adventists! Such a 'minor' detail appeared to concern no one, including Praskov'ia herself.

In fact, it appears as a quiet protest of innocence, recanting at least in part her earlier confession of guilt during the interrogation and retrieving her initial declaration of 'not guilty' at the opening of the trial. In any case, such a blatant contradiction of her pre-trial testimony could not have been scripted by the prosecution, unless they had blundered terribly.

There was another problem in Praskov'ia Glivaskaia's seemingly straightforward testimony at the trial. Regarding the 'illegal' religious literature *The Lessons of Reformed Adventists* seized at the time of her arrest, Praskov'ia stated that she gave the book to Gavriil Belik for reading and that he then copied it for himself. Yet this book is not mentioned in the records of items seized either from Praskov'ia or Belik. This 'minor' detail, too, aroused no concern at the trial.

Like others, Praskov'ia Glivaskaia reiterated that she recognized the Soviet laws as legitimate only insofar as they did not contravene divine law. Presented with the guilty plea she had made before the trial on 24 November, Praskov'ia retracted the not-guilty plea she made at the beginning of the trial and now pleaded guilty again (2:346–6v).

By contrast, Ksenia Belik, Gavriil Belik's mother, gave a testimony so general as to sound robotic. After she stated that her husband and son Gavriil were arrested in 1940 for belonging to the illegal sect, she merely reiterated the familiar themes of the alleged illegal sect of Reformed Adventists: that she placed divine law above the Soviet laws, that she could not serve in the Soviet military because that would violate the Sixth Commandment, and that in any case she had no enemies on earth (2:348–8v).

Vasilii Brovchenko, the youngest defendant, who had already caused trouble at the pre-trial investigation stage, followed with his testimony:

I was brought up in a religious spirit since my father was an Adventist.

Neither my father nor I visited the legal Seventh-Day Adventist sect.

The members of this sect don't strictly follow all the Commandments of Christ and therefore they deprive themselves of the possibility of an eternal afterlife. They violate Christ's Sixth Commandment and allow themselves to serve in the Soviet Army.

I strive to follow strictly all the Commandments of Christ and lead my life with them as my guide.

My life on earth is temporary and I strive for an eternal afterlife. I submit to divine authority and divine law.

All went well so far for the prosecution. Then, however, Brovchenko, like Gavriil Belik had earlier, dropped a bombshell. He declared: 'I did not attend illegal meetings of the Reformed Adventists. I prayed at home with my father, mother, and sister.' In the pre-trial interrogations, as discussed earlier, Brovchenko steadfastly denied attending any illegal meetings of Reformed Adventists. In the end, he was broken and confessed. Now he denied his earlier confessions and pleaded innocence (2:349).

When the judge apparently questioned him about Belokon', the alleged leader of the sect, Brovchenko responded: 'I don't know Vasilii Belokon'. He and I have never met' (2:349). There is no record in his pre-trial interrogation records regarding Belokon'. This may have been because Brovchenko adamantly denied any acquaintance with Belokon'. (He was probably not broken in this matter.) So the record of his denial did not find its way into the case file. The judge, who probably had not done his homework, was not aware of this point of critical importance and made the mistake of asking Brovchenko about Belokon'. No reaction on the part of the judge or the prosecution to Brovchenko's firm denial is recorded in the proceedings.

Vasilii's father, Arkhip Brovchenko, followed with his testimony. According to the court records, he made no statement but merely responded to the prosecution's question (which was not transcribed):

I was an adherent of the Seventh-Day Adventist sect since 1927. In 1949 I stopped attending its meetings because [I came to realize that] it violated the Second Commandment of Christ and [also] allowed its members to serve in the Soviet Army to defend the Motherland with arms in hand.

I disagreed. I now strive only to follow strictly all the Ten Commandments of Christ, for I want to receive an eternal afterlife.

By observing Christ's Sixth Commandment, I stand opposed to serving in the Soviet Army and defending the Motherland with arms in hand.

We have no enemies. To us all people are our brethren. The German occupiers were not enemies to us. They were humans like us.

I recognize only divine authority to which I submit myself. I follow the Soviet laws only insofar as they don't contravene divine law.

I admit that at the time of my arrest anti-Soviet religious literature of Reformed Adventists was seized from me.

Brovchenko, if the court records are credible, completely submitted, not to divine law, but to the script written by the prosecution. In response to the judge's question (which was not transcribed), Brovchenko implicated Belokon': 'I know Vasilii Belokon' since after the war. I met him in the village of Matiushi, at the meetings of Reformed Adventists that took place on Saturdays' (2:350–1).

At this stage, only Belokon' remained to testify. The presiding judge enquired of him whether he wished to give his testimony to the court. Belokon' declined to give any (2:351). With this the first day of the trial ended.

The Trial: Day Two

The court resumed at 10:00 the following morning, 16 December 1952. Witnesses were called to the court. How the question of the witnesses who did not report was solved is not known. Unlike some defendants, whose testimonies surely disturbed the script prepared by the prosecution, the witnesses generally did not give any surprising testimonies. Manuil

Prisiazhniuk, for instance, who took the stand first, merely confirmed his earlier testimony (that his father-in-law Darovskii did not work on Saturdays) (2:352–2v).

Vladimir Noga, the former presbyter (minister) of the Seventh-Day Adventist community in Bila Tserkva, who gave the original, most damning testimony against Belokon' and others, was more forthcoming than Prisiazhniuk. Noga declared: ‘If this sect [of Reformed Adventists] is allowed to spread, it’ll fall into the hands of the enemies of the Soviet government. The activity of this sect is hostile towards and directed at undermining the Soviet government.’ Noga, however, also repeated what must have been an awkward point for the prosecution. He mentioned the name of Artem Bridnia, saying he knew that Artem Bridnia and Vasilii Belokon' had ‘in essence’ organized the split of the Seventh-Day Adventist congregation in Bila Tserkva and formed the separatist sect of Reformed Adventists (2:354–4v). This suggests that the prosecution was not able to dictate every detail of a witness’s testimony. It is also possible that Noga, for his own part, was deeply convinced that Artem Bridnia had to be brought to justice. At any rate, no question was asked about this mysterious Artem Bridnia. The suspicion of Bridnia working as a police agent provocateur looms large in Noga’s testimony at the court.

Matrena Levshchenko’s testimony was very brief, judging from the court record. She knew that the Glivaskaia sisters and Gavriil Belik were ‘Saturdayists.’ She added that she did not know whether they met for prayers. She did confirm that Gavriil Belik often came to the Glivaskaia’s house, a statement emphatically rejected by him in their confrontation (2:354v).

Mariia Stasiuk, the Seventh-Day Adventist who was disfellowshipped because of her illegitimate marriage to another Adventist, merely said that the Glivaskaia sisters, Gavriliuk, and Fedorchuk were ‘Saturdayists.’ She ‘knew nothing more’ (2:354v–5).

Irina Borzak, no relation to the defendant Sergei Borzak, reiterated her earlier testimony that Babenko, Il’chenko, and Borzak belonged to the ‘sect of Saturdayists’ who celebrated Saturdays, whereas ‘we celebrated Sundays.’ She added that she did not know whether Il’chenko and Borzak met at Ivan Babenko’s house for prayers or who else came to Babenko’s house (2:355).

The only member of the Communist Party that was deposed as a witness, Grigorii Borzak, also no relation to the defendant Sergei Borzak, gave a testimony that differed only slightly from his earlier testimony. Yet this slight difference was revealing. He said:

When I worked as the chairman of the [Popravka] village soviet, I was summoned to the District Executive Committee [municipal administration] along with the Saturdayists. There they were warned that they didn't have the right to meet for prayers, because their sect was banned by the organs of the Soviet government.

After that, they secretly met in Ivan Babenko's house for prayers.

Earlier Grigorii Borzak named Ivan Babenko in his testimony as the 'Saturdayist' who was summoned to the district centre along with some others of a different sect. Now he did not mention this other sect, but referred to 'Saturdayists' (in the plural) without naming Babenko. As suggested earlier, Babenko appears to have been a key figure in the Popravka community of 'Saturdayists,' so one would expect him to have been a 'person of interest.' But the prosecution appears to have found it awkward to have Babenko singled out as someone who had been warned by the district authorities. Grigorii Borzak's testimony at the court probably reflects this sentiment of the prosecution. If this speculation is correct, Babenko was probably used or manipulated by the police in one way or another. (In that case, Babenko, as suggested in chapter 4 [see p. 78], probably 'recruited' Sergei Borzak by police order.) Earlier Borzak testified that he did not know what the Saturdayists did in Ivan Babenko's house, but now at the court he averred that they met for prayers (2:355v).

After Grigorii Borzak, the youngest witness Vera Babenko, 18, the granddaughter of the defendant Ivan Babenko, took the witness stand. She stated: 'I know my grandfather Ivan Babenko. I work on the collective farm. I went to school and finished the fourth grade.' To the question of the prosecution (not recorded), Vera Babenko responded:

I'm a believer. I believe that God exists. I don't know whether my family members are believers. I profess the same faith as my grandfather, because I also don't work on Saturdays and with my grandfather I pray to God.

I, like my grandfather Ivan Babenko, strive to follow all the Ten Commandments of divine law.

Then, she answered the question of the defence lawyer Kozlov (whose question was not transcribed): ‘I’ve read a book on the Ten Commandments. This book belonged to my grandfather Ivan Babenko.’ The presiding judge followed with his question (not recorded), and Vera Babenko stated in response:

I’ve lived with my grandfather Ivan Babenko since I was small. To his house came Sergei Berezenko [*sic*, probably a mistake for Sergei Borzak], Fedora Il’chenko, and Polia [Gavriliuk] and Liuba [Fedorchuk] from Bila Tserkva. My grandfather Ivan Babenko held prayer meetings with them where they read the Word of God from the Bible and studied the Ten Commandments. I too attended these prayer meetings.

Ivan Babenko brought me up in the same religious spirit and I endeavour to follow strictly all the Commandments of Jesus.

I cannot work and make weapons at military factories, because that violates the Sixth Commandment of Jesus.

Then the defence lawyer Perel’muter asked her a question (as usual, not recorded), to which Vera Babenko replied: ‘I finished the fourth grade in 1947. I didn’t go to school on Saturdays,⁶ because I believe that Saturday is the rest day’ (2:355v–6).

Mariia Zelinskaia, in whose house Gavriliuk lived, merely said that she knew her, the Glivaskaia sisters, and Fedorchuk as ‘Saturdayists,’ adding that she did not know whether they met for prayers (2:356v–7). Zelinskaia, like Levshchenko, Stasiuk, and Irina Borzak, turned out to be more careful at the trial than at their pre-trial depositions: they all now said that they did not know whether the defendants they knew met for prayers at the Glivaskaias’ or Babenko’s house.

After Zelinskaia, Anna Belik, the wife of Gavriil Belik, took the stand. She was the only spouse to do so. Pilipenko’s wife, who was deposed before the trial, either chose not to report or was secretly kept from the court. The prosecution must have had some confidence in Anna Belik. According to the court record, she merely confirmed her earlier testimonies. She added that Belik did go to meetings of sectarians in 1949, but that after 1949 he

⁶At that time, as Soviet workers laboured for six days a week, Soviet children went to school six days a week. Because of the shortages of school facilities, they often studied in shifts at many schools.

stopped going (2:357). According to the court record, Anna Belik said nothing unfavourable to the prosecution case. Such was in fact not the case, as will become clear (see p. 172). The court simply did not record her testimony in support of her husband.

Finally, Vladimir Chumachenko, who lived with his sister-in-law, the defendant Liubov' Fedorchuk, gave a self-serving testimony: he tried to convince her of the need to renounce her faith (because it was 'harmful to the Soviet government'), only in vain (2:358).

After all the defendants and the witnesses took the stand, the prosecutor Rusetskii gave his final speech:

I consider that the crimes perpetrated by the accused have been proved in the court. On the basis of articles 54-10, part 2, and 54-11 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, I ask for the following measures of punishment: 25 years of correctional labour, with the deprivation of civil rights for [another] five years and the confiscation of their properties, for Gavriil Belik, Belokon', Pilipenko, Darovskii, Ksenia Belik, Il'chenko, Ivan Babenko, Gavriliiuk, Praskov'ia Glivaskaia, and Fedorchuk; 10 years of correctional labour, with the deprivation of civil rights for five years and the confiscation of their properties, for Sekletina Glivaskaia, Borzak, Vasili Brovchenko, and Arkhip Brovchenko.

Even though most of the defendants had no property to lose other than their internal passports and religious literature, Rusetskii solemnly declared the permanent forfeiture of their properties as if they were something very dear to the accused. He gave no reason for his decision that ten of the defendants deserved 25 years and the other four ten years (2:358v-9).

It is clear why Rusetskii demanded a harsh measure of 25 years for some, especially those regarded as key figures, such as Belokon', Babenko, and Praskov'ia Glivaskaia. What difference there was between, say, Ksenia Belik and Sekletina Glivaskaia, is not at all clear. Did Rusetskii consider the age of Borzak, 64, in demanding a lighter sentence for him, even though he was a long-standing believer whose objection to military service dated back all the way to the First World War? In that case, what about the oldest of the defendants, Babenko, 68? There is no ready answer.

After the prosecution's speech, the two defence lawyers took the stand. Kozlov spoke first. His defence is pathetically weak:

I agree [with the prosecution] that the crimes committed [by my clients] can be qualified according to articles 54-10, part 2, and 54-11 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. I request, however, that in deciding the measures of punishment, the court consider that the defendants Praskov'ia Glivaskaia, Pilipenko, and Polina Gavriliuk have never been indicted before by the [Soviet] court. I request that in deciding on the measures of punishment, the court not give harsh sentences to them and instead give them 10 years of confinement.

Kozlov did not even try to defend the accused. It is not that Kozlov lacked lawyerly integrity. Even if he had wanted to question the integrity of the court, he would not have been allowed to do so. He would have risked being charged with a serious political crime ('anti-Soviet propaganda,' for instance) for voicing his doubt about the Soviet criminal justice system.

Kozlov's colleague Perel'muter followed suit, but Perel'muter added a new reason for why the sentences for the accused should be lighter than the ones posed by the prosecution:

I request that in deciding on the measures of punishment the court consider the fact that all the defendants are of low cultural levels and not very literate and that they did all this not from their malice towards the Soviet government but because of their low levels of culture.

With regards to Vasilii Brovchenko, I request that, considering his youth and the fact that he has been under the influence of his father Arkhip Brovchenko since childhood, the court declare him not guilty and limit his sentence to a warning.

It is odd that if Vasilii Brovchenko was not guilty, he should be warned. At any rate, this ended the defence argument (2:359-9v).

Perel'muter's argument is perhaps classic: referring to their 'low cultural development,' he sought to show that the defendants were still living in the age of religious obscurantism and therefore did not understand the political significance and the political implications of their faith. This was a typical Soviet condescension that ranked people as culturally 'advanced,' 'developed,' or 'backward.' Yet Perel'muter's seemingly condescending defence may have been the most powerful argument that the defence was allowed to make at the time. If the defendants' testimonies are taken at face value, they were fully cognizant of the political significance of their faith.

This was the version of the case the prosecution advanced. Perel'muter, borrowing the language of Soviet official discourse, rebutted the prosecution by arguing that the defendants were not fully cognizant, because they were simply not capable of understanding the political significance of their faith and practice by dint of their 'stunted cultural development.'

In the end, the defence arguments had absolutely no effect on the sentences, as will be discussed shortly. Nevertheless, Perel'muter's defence was probably courageous within the context of the time: he urged the court to acknowledge that the defendants did not harbour malice towards the Soviet government. He negated the core of the prosecution case.

After the final words by the prosecution and the defence, each defendant was given the opportunity to give his or her final word (2:360–1). Why the order in which the defendants spoke this time changed from the order in which they gave their testimonies to the court is not explained. Some of their final words must have disturbed the confident prosecution. Yet the court records contain nothing about the prosecution's reaction.

Babenko spoke first. He appeared to be resigned to his fate, but simultaneously appeared to be almost defiant: 'If the court finds me guilty, let the court try me. I don't beg anything from the court.'

Arkhip Brovchenko protested the important point he had made earlier: 'I don't belong to the organization of Reformed Adventists.' Then he asked for clemency: 'I have long held my convictions as an Adventist. I beg the court's discretion.'

Darovskii asked the court to consider his age: 'I beg the court for mercy, because I'm already an old man.'

Fedorchuk was completely resigned to her fate: 'I throw myself on the mercy of the court. Let the court pass judgment as best it can.'

Vasilii Brovchenko appears to have implicitly declared that he was innocent: 'Freedom is dear to a young man. I've had these [religious convictions] for some time. What'll happen in the future – whether I can renounce them or not, I don't know.' Then he exclaimed: 'I ask the court to set me free.' This powerful plea was buried in the prosaic records of the court.

Most others followed Fedorchuk's suit.

Il'chenko: 'I trust to the mercy of the court.'

Ksenia Belik: 'I trust to the mercy of the court.'

Borzak: 'I beg the court to mitigate the measures of punishment for me.'

Sekletina Glivaskaia: 'I trust to the mercy of the court.'

Praskov'ia Glivaskaia: 'I trust to the mercy of the court.'

Pilipenko: 'I've been a convinced believer of this faith. I trust to the discretion of the court.'

Gavriil Belik, like Arkhip Brovchenko, protested his innocence: 'I beg the court to consider the fact that I was under the influence of my father. I have already been convicted of belonging to this sect and served the punishment. Now I don't belong to it. I was merely interested in the religious literature which I read.' His protest did not attract the attention of the judges.

Gavriliuk: 'I trust to the mercy of the court.'

Finally Belokon' was asked whether he wished to give his final word to the court. He declined.

This ended the two-day court session. The court adjourned for the discussion of verdicts and sentences. Returning from the discussion, the presiding judge announced the verdicts and sentences to the reconvened court and explained the appellate process to the Supreme Court of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. (The details of the process are not recorded in the case file.) The court was declared closed at 20:00 on 16 December 1952 (2:361).

The Judgments

The verdicts read (2:366-70):

All the accused harboured enmity towards the Soviet government. They are active members of the sect of Reformed Adventists. They wished actively to undermine the military might of the Soviet Union and spoke against serving in the Soviet Army and bearing arms in defence of the Motherland as well as against strengthening the economic and military power of our Motherland.

The verdicts maintained that the defendants held illegal meetings and,

in the course of many years they kept the anti-Soviet literature of Reformed Adventists in their houses. Some literature, pub-

lished in America, was copied by hand and distributed to both their accomplices and to the population [of the District of Bila Tserkva].

All the defendants stated to the court that they did not recognize the laws of the Soviet government aimed at strengthening the economic and military might of our Motherland and defending it with arms in hand, and that they cannot follow these [Soviet] laws because they contravene their 'teaching.' Rejecting the Soviet laws, the defendants do not recognize the Soviet government as legitimate.

It should be noted that the characterization of 'all the defendants' is obviously wrong, for Belokon' did not make any statement to the court. Confusingly, the verdicts noted: 'All the defendants pleaded not guilty on the grounds of their religious convictions.' This was true at the outset of the trial (except for Belokon', who refused to speak). Yet when at least five of the defendants (Il'chenko, Gavriliuk, Babenko, Fedorchuk, and Borzak) took the stand in the court, they reversed their pleas and pleaded guilty. It is possible that the judges wanted to portray the defendants as recalcitrant believers who refused to admit to their crimes. At any rate, the verdicts declared that the guilt of all the defendants was proved conclusively in the court.

The judges followed the prosecution's demands (except for Gavriliuk) in sentencing the condemned: Belokon', Darovskii, Pilipenko, Babenko, Gavrail Belik, Il'chenko, Ksenia Belik, Praskov'ia Glivaskaia, and Fedorchuk were given 25 years of confinement 'in remote areas of the Soviet Union,' with an additional five years of deprivation of civil rights as defined in article 29, items 'a,' 'b,' and 'c' of the criminal code of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic,⁷ and the forfeiture of 'all' their properties. (The sentencing added 'all,' an adjective the prosecution did not use in its recommendation. It may be that the court merely wished to clarify the measure without ambiguity to avoid any future dispute, as if it mattered to the condemned.) Vasilii Brovchenko, Arkhip Brovchenko, Borzak, Sekletina Glivaskaia, and Gavriliuk were sentenced to 10 years of confinement, with

⁷Article 29, items 'a,' 'b,' and 'c' stipulated the deprivation of rights to 'active and passive election rights,' 'the right to assume elective positions in social organizations,' and 'the right to assume governmental positions' respectively. See *Ugolovnyi kodeks Ukrainskoi SSR*, 10.

the same additional punishments as the other nine defendants sentenced to 25 years. Why the court decided that Gavriliuk be given 10 instead of 25 years, as the prosecution demanded, was not explained in the sentencing.

There is no evidence whatsoever that the court took note of the inconsistencies and contradictions that the testimonies of the defendants at the court revealed or the implicit protestations by Arkhip Brovchenko, Vasili Brovchenko, and Gavrill Belik in their final words before the court. Nor is there any evidence that the pleas for clemency by the defendants and the defence lawyers had any impact on the sentences. The guilt of the accused and the sentences against them were predetermined. The court was merely pro forma.

It is not possible to determine whether the judges were actually convinced of the guilt of the accused or whether they acted under duress from above. Both versions are likely true. This probably explains the harshness of the sentences – to many of the defendants 25 years of confinement was almost tantamount to a death sentence. The judges were almost certainly convinced Communists and atheists. From their perspective, the accused must have appeared guilty by default. Whatever inconsistencies and contradictions may have been revealed in the process, they were mere trivia to them. If, as portrayed by the prosecution, the accused lived and acted clandestinely, the judges probably reckoned that their testimonies and explanations were naturally contradictory because they made up some information and hid still other vital information in order to cover up their crimes: they still refused to surrender completely to Soviet justice. Such was the nature of any secret organization. The more inconsistent and contradictory the defendants' testimonies were, the more guilty they appeared to the critical eyes of the Soviet judges.

7 Appeals and Exoneration

Keep thee far from a false matter;
and the innocent and righteous slay thou not:
for I will not justify the wicked.¹

IN 1952 in the Soviet Union a large number of people were still being executed. The year recorded 1612 death sentences for ‘political criminals’.² The present case of the fourteen Reformed Adventists also constituted political crimes of anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation. Yet 1952 was a far cry from the time of the Great Terror, when people were executed in the hundreds and thousands. Moreover, in 1952, even those accused of political crimes were tried not extrajudicially but judicially (formally by the court) and they were allowed to appeal the verdicts to a higher court, which was not the case at the time of the Great Terror.

The defendants of the present case knew that they were not faced with capital punishment. Nevertheless, the harshness of the sentences appears to have astonished them. What bargains, if any, were negotiated between the prosecution and the defendants before the trial is not known. Very often, under duress, defendants accepted the promise of a lighter sentence for a guilty plea. It is very likely that at least some of the fourteen defendants accepted such plea bargains.

At any rate, seven of the defendants, all men, did contest their sentences and appealed to the higher court. One of these was Vasilii Belokon’, who had steadfastly refused to speak throughout the preliminary investigation and trial. Thanks to these appeals, one can examine the mechanism whereby the police and the prosecution framed the case. Had the defendants been executed without the right to appeal, the present case might have appeared cut and dried, notwithstanding the contradictions and inconsistencies in the case file. After all, most of the defendants openly challenged the Soviet laws in defence of divine law. The police and the

¹Exodus 23:7.

²VP Popov, ‘Gosudarstvennyi terror v sovetskoi Rossii. 1923–1953 gg. (istochniki i ikh interpretatsiya)’, *Otechestvennyi arkhiv*, 1992, no. 2, 28.

prosecution could easily have concluded an almost air-tight case of an anti-Soviet sectarian organization. They were obstructed, however, by the appeals.

Appeals

Seven men – Belokon', Pilipenko, Vasilii Brovchenko, Gavriil Belik, Darovskii, Arkhip Brovchenko, and Babenko – appealed on 19 December 1952, three days after the judgement of the court was announced. Their defence lawyers probably assisted them. Soon after the trial, Perel'muter wrote, on behalf of both Vasilii Brovchenko and his father Arkhip, to the Supreme Court of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in Kiev, that the Brovchenkos considered the 16 December 1952 judgements ‘incorrect’ on grounds that would be discussed in their appeal for cassation (2:373–4). Whether Perel'muter and Kozlov wrote similar notes on behalf of the others is not known. Seven defendants did submit their appeals to the Supreme Court on 19 December.

Surprisingly, Belokon', the alleged leader of the sectarian organization in Bila Tserkva, who had refused to speak throughout the process, submitted an appeal as well. On 19 December 1952, three days after the sentencing, he broke his silence and filed a grievance for cassation to the Supreme Court of Ukraine in Kiev from Prison No. 4 in Bila Tserkva. Unfortunately, the document is difficult to read: Belokon's penmanship is poor, and the far left side of the document is tightly bound in the file and simply cannot be read. Nevertheless, one can grasp the gist of his appeal. Grammatical errors and numerous spelling mistakes betray the level of his literacy, and incomplete and incoherent sentences his mental agitation. In addition, Ukrainian and Russian phrases are mixed in his appeal.

First, Belokon' states that he was born not in 1895, as alleged in the bill of indictment, but in 1885, and he claims to possess evidence. (If so, he was 67 rather than 57.) He entreats: ‘Repeal the sentence,’ a death sentence for someone his age, and ‘Let me rest.’ He emphasizes that he is ill – mute and faint. He has lost speech and memory, and his reason is ‘depleted.’ He complains that after his arrest he was subjected to nocturnal interrogations. He lost his will. Sleep escaped him. (Obviously, his interrogation records were incomplete, for the only nightly interrogation

recorded was 26 November, from 17:30–24:00.) Then he entreats again: ‘Don’t try me. I’m ill.’ He then asks,

for what was I tried and what evil did I do to the Soviet government, inasmuch as I was taught by the Bible that all authority is given by God and that all resistance is resistance to divine dispensation? How could I resist God? . . . I couldn’t defend myself or speak with my tired tongue before the court . . . I do my duty with all my heart to the government, from [bail?] to tax, and I do my duty to God. And so I, a Seventh-Day Adventist, beg the Supreme Court for mercy. I have a dangerous illness from which I currently suffer. I’m deprived of speech.

He ends his appeal by emphasizing his history of physical labour: ‘I earnestly beg you not to deprive me of reason in my old age so that I perish. Let me die in peace. I’ve toiled laboriously in road work and at granite quarries, and my body is broken from the hard labour. I beg you to hear me [because] I’m in danger.’ Belokon’ used the Ukrainian word for petitioner (*prokhach*) before his name and signed this appeal (2:384–4v).

Belokon’ did not mention that he was a Reformed Adventist. On the contrary, he stated that he was a Seventh-Day Adventist. Was he really a Reformed Adventist? What did he mean by ‘deprived of speech’ (*razgovor u menia sniat*)?

It is possible and even likely that Belokon’ used silence to avoid incriminating himself and others arrested in the present case. Even though the Soviet laws did not grant the defendants the right to remain silent, he exercised it in any case. The prosecution accepted it without fuss. Why? Can Belokon’ be seen as a heroic fighter and resister who sought to protect his integrity and decency as a believer and human being by refusing to speak?²³

²³Belokon’ was probably not familiar with the technique practised by the secret police. The Soviet spy master Pavel Sudoplatov used it and survived when he was arrested after Stalin’s death: ‘I decided to follow Sergei Shpigelglas’s instructions for illegals who are caught red-handed with no way to deny their guilt: gradually stop talking, gradually stop eating. Do not announce a hunger strike; just place the remains of your meals in the waste bucket. In two or three weeks, you will find yourself in a state of total prostration, at which point you should refuse to accept any food. It will be two or three weeks before a doctor examines you, diagnoses exhaustion, and orders you hospitalized and placed on intravenous feeding . . . The crucial moment . . . was enduring the terrible pain of a spinal tap used to break your stupor and bring you back to your normal senses. If you passed this

Another possibility that emerges distinctly from Belokon's case is that he worked for the police. Under Stalin, it was standard practice for the police to recruit ministers of the cloth into service through intimidation and threat. This proved relatively easy, as all priests had been terrorized by the Soviet government. Politically suspect by definition because of their faith, priests were detained on various charges and forced to choose between death or imprisonment and service for the police. The police benefitted either way. Even were they exposed as police informants or agents, the resulting damage was felt not so much by the police as by the exposed priest, who was seen to have made a pact with the devil. He was certain to be discredited (and even damned) by believers and disgraced by the pact. The police availed themselves of this golden opportunity everywhere. True, there were pitfalls, the most serious being that the police could not trust the information supplied by the priest-collaborators, since their political loyalty was suspect to begin with. Thus, numerous priests, accused of misinformation and disinformation, were killed under Stalin.⁴

Probably Belokon', like Vladimir Noga, the former presbyter in Bila Tserkva, belonged to the Seventh-Day Adventist community and not the Reformed Adventists. Earlier, in 1948–9, as discussed in chapter 1 (p. 30), Belokon' was implicated in the arrests of Reformed Adventists in Kiev. It is difficult to believe the police claim that Belokon' escaped and was in hiding for four years. After all, Belokon' continued to live in his native village of Vinnytsia and appeared to have visited Bila Tserkva and its surrounding villages frequently. The police could easily have apprehended him. Yet they did not.

How about his son, Sergei, who was said to have refused to serve in the Soviet Army? Is this true? If so, why was he not implicated? The police merely stated that there was not enough evidence against him. This, too, is very difficult to believe. Moreover, one wonders why a 'mug shot' of Belokon' was not taken when he was arrested or at least why his 'mug shot' was not included in the case file, whereas those of all the others were.

test, any panel of psychiatrists would certify that you were totally unfit for interrogation or any type of court hearing.' Pavel Sudoplatov and Anatoli Sudoplatov, *Special Tasks: The Memoirs of an Unwanted Witness – A Soviet Spymaster* (Boston, 1994), 387–8.

⁴See, for instance, Hiroaki Kuromiya, *The Voices of the Dead: Stalin's Great Terror in the 1930s* (New Haven and London, 2007), 91–2.

(In addition, exactly where he lived in 1952, in Bila Tserkva or Vinnytsia, was never made clear.) Throughout its history, the Reformed Adventist group in the Soviet Union was deeply penetrated by the police. At the same time, there were believers who refused to submit to the police and stood their ground.⁵

Most likely, after his son Sergei was sentenced to ten years in 1944, Belokon' agreed to collaborate with the police in exchange for the release of his son. Indeed, it appears that Sergei was freed before his term expired and worked with his father in the market of Bila Tserkva until his father was arrested in 1952.

Everything in Belokon's case makes sense if Belokon' was a clandestine police agent. In his appeal he even insists that he accepted the Soviet government as sanctioned by God and that he did his duty with all his heart to the government, 'from [bail?] to tax,' and that he was a loyal Soviet citizen even if he was a believer. After all the others were arrested, the police apparently decided to use him as the ringleader of the arrested Adventists without disclosing his actual service to the police. He was the linchpin of the sectarian organization that in fact did not exist: he created it by police order. Without him, it would have been difficult to link all the others to the non-existing sectarian organization.

Belokon' appears to have been completely shocked by his arrest and at a loss what to do. He could only disclose on pain of death that he was a police agent.⁶ Clearly, he had not entirely lost his conscience. It would seem that he could not face those whom he had 'recruited' and therefore decided not to speak. He said nothing in the preliminary investigations. Although by his own account he was tortured (see p. 165), he still refused

⁵See the discussion of informers, agents, and brave followers in N. Mitrokhin, ed., *Dokumenty po istorii Vsesoiuznoi tserkvi Vernykh i Svobodnykh Adventistov Sed'mogo Dnia (VTs VSASD)* (Moscow, 1995), 15, 32, 35, 39, 45, 59, and 67.

⁶In 1930 all priests were said to be required to sign a pledge dictated by the police: 'I [such and such] take it upon myself to submit to the GPU [secret police] whatever information is required of me and to keep this in secret on pain of [breaking] the law of wartime.' (Antoine Wenger, *Rome et Moscou 1900–1950* [Paris, 1987], 372). (The reference to '[breaking] the law of wartime' means that the revelation of work for the secret police constituted the crime of 'treason.') The same pledge was probably made by Belokon' and others. For the case of a sectarian (a 'Wanderer' of a 'radical offshoot of priestless Old Believers') turned police agent in Russia in the 1930s and 1940s, see Irina Paert, 'Preparing God's Harvest: Maksim Zalesskii, Millenarianism, and the Wanderers in Soviet Russia,' *The Russian Review* 64:1 (2005), 44–61.

to speak. He said nothing in confrontations with others accused along with him. He kept silent during the trial. He probably did so in hopes that his true identity would be kept secret and that the police would see to it that he receive a lenient sentence. His shock and fear may have made him ill, physically and mentally, as he claimed, resulting in the loss of his memory and speech.

In the end, it seems clear that the police preferred Belokon's silence to his being uncovered in the court as a police provocateur. When Belokon' said that he was deprived of speech, he was probably indicating that he simply had not been free to discuss his 'crimes.' Indeed, Belokon' did not understand why he was being tried, asking in his appeal why he was tried and what evil he had committed against the Soviet government.

For a fortnight nothing appears to have happened. Then, on 2 January 1953, the procuracy rebutted Belokon'. Belokon' claimed, the procuracy noted, that he lost his speech because during the investigation 'illegal methods of interrogation' (a euphemism for torture) were applied to him, but during the trial he did not make such a statement. (Belokon' does not explicitly mention 'illegal methods' in his 20 December 1952 appeal. So it is likely that, realizing that his first grievance would lead nowhere, he wrote another appeal in which he more explicitly condemned the police. This prompted an action by the procuracy whose job it was to ensure legal procedures by all parties concerned. Even under Stalin torture was illegal, although he sanctioned it in 1937, and two years later blamed others for the use of 'illegal methods of investigation.' Nevertheless, torture never stopped. Belokon's second appeal did not find its way to the case file. The police probably deemed it inexpedient to include it.) The procuracy concluded that there were grounds to suspect that his loss of speech was merely simulation. So it ordered that Belokon' be examined by the court physician-psychiatrist Dr Gal'perina and an otolaryngologist. The procuracy wanted to know whether Belokon' was actually deaf and mute at the present time and, if so, what caused his deaf and mute condition. The order was signed by the procuracy's medical section chief Podlesnaia. (2:388–9).

Belokon' was immediately examined, and a medical report was submitted the following day, 4 January 1953. Belokon' had a somewhat elevated blood pressure (90/150). Otherwise, the four medical doctors consulted, Gal'perina (psychiatrist), Sinel'nikov (otolaryngologist), Popova (surgeon),

and Snarskaia (neuropathologist), concluded that Belokon' was healthy, physically and mentally: he was neither deaf nor mute, and his conduct assumed 'the characteristic of protest' (2:390–9ov).

On the same day, 19 December 1952, as Belokon' submitted his appeal, Pilipenko wrote his appeal for cassation in *surzhyk*, a mixture of Russian and Ukrainian. (He signed his letter as 'Pelepenko.') He recounted his life briefly, including his military service during the Second World War. He stated that because of his religious convictions (he was brought up, as discussed earlier, in a Seventh-Day Adventist family and was baptized in 1923), he was assigned to an 'economic platoon.' Then he described his internment, first in Latvia and then in Germany, and his military service in the Red Army's 'sanitary unit' after he was liberated in Germany. After he moved to Bila Tserkva he joined the Seventh-Day Adventist community there. He had to work on Saturdays, but he had doubts. When he asked the presbyter (likely Vladimir Noga) about working on Saturdays, his answer was 'There is no such provision.' (It is not clear exactly what the 'provision' referred to: 'You may work on Saturdays' or 'You shall not work on Saturdays.' In any case, even though he was the presbyter of Bila Tserkva, as discussed earlier, Noga was rather ignorant of the faith of Seventh-Day Adventists. If he was acting as a police provocateur, he acted in such a way that some of the doubters would be encouraged to leave the Seventh-Day Adventist community and go underground. It appears that the police considered that Noga, unlike Belokon', was not very reliable and they did not use him in the ways in which they did Belokon'.) Later, a preacher from Kiev told him that in the event of necessity one must work on Saturdays and also perform all forms of military service. Pilipenko and others disagreed and were disfellowshipped (2:376).

If this is the case, Pilipenko's religious convictions deepened during the war. Perhaps because of the war, he gained pacifist convictions or regained them if he was already a pacifist in the 1920s. According to Pilipenko, after he and others were disfellowshipped, the presbyter (whom Pilipenko did not name, but who was almost certainly Noga) 'reported to the authorities that I conducted religious propaganda illegally.' Pilipenko emphatically stated: 'There is no evidence of that.' After his expulsion, he never propagated his beliefs: 'In interrogations I was *accused* of not recognizing the Soviet government as legitimate. But *I acknowledge the Soviet government as a legitimate government and submit myself to it in all*

matters except when it contravenes the Law of God.' Pilipenko emphasized the two italicized sections in the quoted text by underlining them. This was a courageous statement: he declared that he was a loyal citizen of the Soviet Union (indeed, he was a war veteran) but he was also a believer who held the Law of God higher than the Soviet laws.

It was precisely this belief in the absolute Law of God that the Soviet government meant to eliminate. Yet Pilipenko, returning from the carnage of the war, had become a pacifist and was not willing to come to terms with the Soviet laws. True, he was a veteran and, at 54 (or 50 when he returned to the Seventh-Day Adventist community), he was no longer required to serve in the military. Yet without challenging the atheist government in other areas, he declared that he would obey the Law of God in defiance of the Soviet government in areas where they collided.

Pilipenko appealed for the reconsideration of his sentence, stating that he was a war veteran, and now a 54-year-old invalid. He added that he had five sons and one daughter: one of his children was still studying, but five of them were working 'in Soviet construction' (which meant in factories, government offices, on collective farms, and on construction sites) (2:376–6v).

In his appeal he wrote his name 'Pelepenko' and signed as 'Pelepenko' (2:376v). Since all his interrogation and confrontation records are signed as 'Pilipenko,' and considering the clear difference in the two signatures, one can only conclude that the signature 'Pilipenko' written on the pages of interrogation records was almost certainly forged by the police.

Is it possible that Pilipenko deliberately modified his signature in signing his interrogation and confrontation records, knowing that his testimonies in them were untrue? His signature on these documents is somewhat shaky, revealing a low level of literacy. Yet his appeal is in a much surer penmanship. It may be that his appeal was written by someone else. However, this someone was clearly not his defence lawyer Perel'muter, whose handwriting is quite different. If someone else wrote the appeal for Pilipenko, why would he not have signed it? There is no ready answer.

Vasilii Brovchenko, the youngest of the defendants, wrote his appeal on the same day as Belokon' and Pilipenko, 19 December. Although, like all other appeals, this one, too, was handwritten and not all parts are decipherable, the gist is clear. He states that he was arrested on 15 November. (This meant that he had been detained for two or three days

before his arrest was sanctioned.) He recounts his upbringing by his father in the spirit of the Seventh-Day Adventists whose faith he accepted in 1927. In the interrogations,

I was accused of having conducted agitation against the Soviet government and having belonged to an illegal organization. There is no evidence of it. At the time of my arrest, [contrary to the indictment] no books were seized from me. I wasn't in the organization in which I was placed [by the prosecution]. I didn't visit anyone anywhere [for prayers]. I lived with my father and so was familiar with the Bible and the Law of God.

He went on to discuss his attitude towards divine law and the Soviet laws:

I was asked how I understood the Law of God and [answered] I understood it as it is written. I did not commit any crime by saying so.

I also recognize the Soviet government as a legitimate government and *accept all its requirements that are in conformance with the Law of God*. My opinions are not directed in hostile ways against the Soviet government *but they are religious convictions*. The court sentenced me to ten years, however, even though there is no evidence that I was a member of an organization or conducted anti-Soviet propaganda. I myself have not quite understood the teaching and the ideas of which I am being accused.

Brovchenko underlined phrases to emphasize them. He ended his appeal by asking for the reconsideration of his case and for the repeal of his sentence (2:377–7v).

Perhaps realizing that his appeal was not accepted, Brovchenko sent a second appeal, penned by Perel'muter, for cassation to the Supreme Court on 14 January 1953. Brovchenko repeated what he had said earlier, that he was not a member of any sect. He could not have been a member: he had not taken the ritual of 'ablution' (*omovenie*), which he said was a requirement for new members. Nor had he visited any prayer meetings. He did not know what other defendants did, but he insisted that it was wrong to lump him together with them. He also emphasized that

During all my adult life I always performed my governmental and social duties, there is not a single case in my life when I avoided such duties.

Especially, when I was still young (born in 1928), I didn't avoid a call-up to the ranks of the Soviet Army. I reported in time to the military authorities, but because of my health conditions I was declared unfit for military service by the medical commission . . . I have never tried to dissuade anyone from joining the ranks of the Soviet Army.

He added that he never visited any religious meetings, that he prayed only at home, that he never read any sermons containing the teaching of the 'Reformed Adventists' or introduced them to anyone, and that he never considered joining the sect (2:385–6).

With the help of his defence lawyer Perel'muter, Brovchenko analyzed the Soviet laws:

Statute 54-10, part 2, of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic defines propaganda and agitation of an anti-Soviet nature and the dissemination, production, and possession of anti-Soviet literature as crime.

I didn't conduct any propaganda or agitation of an anti-Soviet nature. I never pronounced to anyone any sermons containing the teaching of the 'Reformed Adventists.' I didn't possess, produce, or distribute any anti-Soviet literature.

Therefore I consider that there is no ground for convicting me according to Statutes 54-10, part 2, and 54-11 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

If I have sometimes prayed in an Adventist way under the influence of my upbringing from childhood, I did it solely for myself. Never did I perform any *acts* stipulated in Statutes 54-10, part 2, and 54-11 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

He ended his appeal asking for the abrogation of his sentence or else the reconsideration of his case (2:386).

It appears that Brovchenko demolished the prosecution case completely. He was broken down in the pre-trial interrogations and had admitted his guilt. Then at the trial, as discussed in the previous chapter, he declared that he had never visited any prayer meetings and that he did not know Belokon'. All the same, he was convicted and sentenced to ten years. So he fought back.

Brovchenko's appeal suggests that he was a believer who struggled to make the Soviet laws and divine law compatible. He held his faith privately and did not associate with other believers of the same or similar faiths. The police did not believe him and made him out to be a dangerous sectarian.

Another defendant, Gavril Belik, who, like Vasilii Brovchenko, had shaken the prosecution case in court, similarly wrote an appeal for cassation (handwritten in *surzhyk*) to the Supreme Court on 19 December 1952. In it he stated that his father was a Seventh-Day Adventist and, from 1937 (when he was seventeen), brought him up in the Adventist spirit and taught him to live according to the Bible's precepts. (The year 1937 is significant, because it was the time of the Great Terror in which numerous believers were executed. Nevertheless, Belik's father decided to bring his son up in a religious spirit.) In 1938 the assembly of Seventh-Day Adventists in Kiev (where he and his family lived) closed. His father was arrested in due course. Belik himself was summoned to the police after a fortnight. Interrogated, he stated to them that he could not kill anyone owing to his religious convictions. Then, after a while he, too, was arrested, and given five years, which he served in the Gulag in Tomsk, West Siberia. He stated that in the Gulag he came to realize that he did not understand any religion (2:382). In other words, he suggested that, as a result of his arrest and imprisonment and his term in the Gulag, he had become a non-believer.

He maintained that in 1947, after he was released from the Gulag, he married a non-believer like himself. Yet his old faith began to return to him at some point, because he added that in 1950 he chanced to walk by the assembly of Seventh-Day Adventists and visited it. (During his interrogation, he had said that he went to such a meeting in Bila Tserkva in 1951.) After a month or so he visited the meeting again and asked the preacher (the presbyter Ivan Noga?), whether he had acted rightly before the war when he admitted to the police that he did not believe in killing anyone. The presbyter said that Belik was right. So he asked him what to do now, to which the presbyter said, 'You shall not kill, for [undecipherable, but it seems to say, 'he who loses'] faith in Christ will be persecuted.' In response Belik said, 'So there was no need for me to go to prison?' Belik did not respect the presbyter, for he had suffered because he had not forsaken God. Belik stopped going to the meetings. If this preacher was Noga, then he certainly acted as a provocateur to

entrap Belik. (At the trial Noga did mention that Gavril Belik visited the Seventh-Day Adventist community several times and then stopped coming [2:354]). Belik may have sensed that Noga was working for the police as a provocateur. More likely, however, he could not accept a preacher who did not recognize the sacrifice he had made for his faith. Belik had already served five years in the Gulag for his faith.

Belik goes on to say in his appeal that some Seventh-Day Adventists in Bila Tserkva invited him to their homes and he learned that they had been disfellowshipped owing to differences with the Seventh-Day Adventists. He was then called up for military service 'for retraining' (*perepodgotovka*).

In 1950 he fulfilled his military service. Then, in 1951 he went 'in passing' to see the expelled Seventh-Day Adventists. (Belik said 'in passing,' but it is likely that he was interested in the faith of the disfellowshipped Adventists.) He was accused by them of drinking and smoking. He was then given a book called *The Awakening of Reform among the Seventh-Day Adventists*, published in Germany in 1914, to read and copy. He was interested in learning the differences they had with the Seventh-Day Adventists. In 1952 he was called up for another round of retraining, but

because I was taught that one mustn't bear arms, I didn't take up arms on the first day [of retraining], but on the second day I couldn't do so any longer and honestly served with weapons and received an 'Excellent' evaluation. A fortnight after I completed this retraining muster, some of the believers I had visited began to be arrested, and then so was I . . .

I was asked whether I was willing to bear arms and I answered that I would in order to defend the Motherland, but that was not recorded [in the records of interrogation by the interrogators]. Then they asked me how to understand the Law of God correctly according to the Bible. So I began to describe how I was taught and how I read [the Bible], but they began to accuse me of being of the same opinion as those [arrested] people. So I said that their beliefs were opposed to mine and I don't agree with them, which the facts of my life demonstrate. But they [the interrogators] didn't heed what I said in the interrogations, instead they indicted me, saying, 'You [ty] just sign [this document] and [if you disagree,] speak at the trial.' In my interrogation records there is no evidence that I spoke about religion anywhere or that I had anything in common with this group, as my wife sought to

demonstrate [at the trial] [two words undecipherable], so one can conclude that I was not in touch with these people. (2:382–2v)

The police ignored Belik's protestation during the preliminary investigations, placating him by saying that he could vindicate himself at the trial if he wanted to dispute the police. One of 'these people' Belik mentions at the end of the appeal just quoted included Artem Bridnia, who remained a mystery man throughout the process, most likely because he was a police agent provocateur. Knowing Belik's background, the police and their agents sought to entrap Belik by giving him a book of the Reformed Adventists to read and copy. He was not trapped, however. In court, his wife Anna had also said something in defence of her husband (probably that Gavriil had not associated with the other arrested people), but that was not recorded in the trial proceedings.

Belik continues in his appeal:

I've lived with my wife. I know nothing about her being unsatisfied [with her life with me] or about my teaching her religion. On the contrary she always went to the cinema and the theatre with me and enjoyed [an undecipherable word] with great pleasure everything that other people enjoyed . . .

But I have been accused of going against the Soviet laws, at a time when I strove to follow the Soviet government in all areas of life. There is no evidence that I don't obey the command of the Soviet government. Because a notebook [containing excerpts from a book of the Reformed Adventists] was seized from me, they say that I am a Reformed Adventist. I told them that my life didn't correspond to that teaching, to which all my neighbours can testify [a few words unintelligible] because I lived just like them.

Also, at the trial I said exactly the same thing. Yet they didn't heed me and didn't let me speak [further].

So it turns out that when Belik mentioned his military service at court, he was silenced. He adds in his appeal that his wife suffers from tuberculosis and that they have a young son (four years of age) whom he will not be able to support if he is imprisoned. He concludes his missive with a plea for the reconsideration of his case and the repeal of his sentence (2:382–2v).

What one can gather from this is that although Gavriil Belik had been brought up as a Seventh-Day Adventist, while serving his term in the

Gulag, he came to question all religion. He did not abandon his moral beliefs altogether, as he appeared to disagree that one could kill others in war. Yet he strove to live as a good Soviet citizen like his neighbours. Like Vasilii Brovchenko, he sought to find some middle ground between the Soviet laws and divine law. All the same, he seems to have fallen into the hands of agents provocateurs. Although he initially escaped their net, he was arrested in the end. In his appeal, however, he conclusively destroyed the case they had made against him.

On 19 December, Dem'ian Darovskii also submitted an appeal for cassation to the Supreme Court. He recounted his past indictments briefly, and stated that after his second release from the Gulag in 1947, he began to visit the meeting of Seventh-Day Adventists in the city of Bila Tserkva in 1951. He became convinced that it was necessary to follow the divine commandments and believe in Jesus Christ as the Adventists taught and the Bible instructed. He said he was arrested on 15 December 1952 (clearly mistaken for November). He continued:

When I was arrested, no [religious] literature was found. In the interrogations and at the trial I was accused of not recognizing the Soviet government as legitimate, but I do recognize the Soviet government and follow it as our legitimate government, installed by God. I perform all requirements, pay tax, and all things the government demands of me, according to my religious convictions. The accusations made against me were not confirmed by the witnesses.

I am not acquainted with the records of the court. Nor am I familiar with all other documents [of the present case].

He complained that he was given 25 years in the Gulag, and ended with a plea for the reconsideration of his case and the repeal of the sentence (2:380–80v).

Darovskii was an old Christian with two past convictions. By Soviet definition, he was a good example of a ‘recidivist.’ This veteran of ten years in the Gulag was perhaps fated to be arrested again, because he had not given up his faith. It is almost certain that his faith was not what the police presented it to be. He wanted to live as the Bible taught, but at the same time he accepted the Soviet government as something given by God.

Even so, Darovskii maintained that his belief did not constitute a crime. He had not conducted any agitation or propagandized for his

faith. Nor had he taken part in illegal prayer meetings: he did not belong to any clandestine sect. He disagreed with the Seventh-Day Adventist community in respect to the Second and the Sixth Commandments, but that did not make him a member of an illegal sect. Like Vasilii Brovchenko, he kept his faith privately, which Darovskii insisted did not constitute a crime.

Vasilii Brovchenko's father, Arkhip Brovchenko, also filed an appeal for cassation to the Supreme Court of Ukraine. For some reason, his first appeal, filed on 19 December 1952, is not included in the case file. Maybe he said that he was tortured in his appeal. If so, that would have been a reason to remove it from the case file after Stalin's death, when police torture was being loudly condemned in the campaign for de-Stalinization. Fortunately, his second appeal, penned by his defence lawyer Perel'muter and submitted on 14 January 1953, the same day as his son Vasilii submitted his second appeal, is extant. In it he emphasizes that he did not harbour enmity towards the Soviet government:

In professing the faith of the 'Reformed Adventists,' I believe that one cannot violate the Commandment 'Thou shalt not kill.' In my belief, the violation of the Commandment would deprive me of an eternal afterlife in the future, after my death. I have no specific goal of weakening the might of the Soviet government.

I beg you to consider that I am a person with a low level of cultural development: I studied only for two years, finishing the second grade.

When joining the sect of 'Reformed Adventists' I didn't delve into the nature of the teaching of this sect in terms of class struggle or politics. I was merely interested in its religious side.

Brovchenko emphasized that since moving to the city of Bila Tserkva in 1951, he never attended any meeting. He only prayed at home 'in a sectarian way' (*po-sektantski*) and did not intend to recruit anyone to his faith. He added that he was very ill and asked for the reconsideration of his sentence (2:387–7v).

Arkhip Brovchenko was the only one of those who submitted an appeal to the Supreme Court who admitted that he belonged to the sect of 'Reformed Adventists,' with quotation marks. (This was also confirmed by his son Vasilii Brovchenko in his appeal, in which he said his father professed the teaching of Reformed Adventists [2:385v].) So it is possible

that a ‘group’ of co-religionists did exist. Yet he then qualified his statement by saying that he had never attended any meetings since moving to the city. This suggests that the sect did *not* exist as an organization in Bila Tserkva. Like his son Vasilii and Darovskii, Arkhip also kept his faith privately.

Finally, Ivan Babenko, the oldest of the defendants, also submitted an appeal for cassation to the Supreme Court on 19 December 1952. He stated that in 1926 he joined a collective farm and at the same time adopted the religion of the Seventh-Day Adventists. The Adventist religious community was eliminated in 1929, after which he did not join any organization. He remained a believer, however, in the sense that he followed what the Adventists had taught regarding the divine commandments:

I was arrested by the Bila Tserkva MGB on 16 November 1952. At the time of my arrest, Seventh-Day Adventist literature was seized from me. In the interrogations I correctly answered the questions asked of me, namely, I was asked whether I belonged to an organization of Reformed Adventists, but I didn’t even know of such an organization. Furthermore, I was accused of conducting agitation in prayer meetings and elsewhere. Not a single witness confirmed such a thing, and there were three witnesses summoned to the court. It is terrible and astonishing that the court sentenced me, a 70-year-old man, to 25 years of punishment.

Babenko asked the Supreme Court to abrogate his sentence (2:378–8v).

Babenko had not even heard of the sect of Reformed Adventists when he was interrogated. The mysterious relations between him and the Seventh-Day Adventist presbyter Noga, discussed earlier (see p. 105), were never clarified. Nor was the warning he was said to have received about illegal meetings in his house. However, he admits being a believer and a ‘Saturdayist.’ He brought up his granddaughter in the spirit of his belief. His house was visited by some people who were also ‘Saturdayists.’ Yet he did not belong to any organization and, as was the case with other people discussed here, his faith remained private. No alleged anti-Soviet views or illegal prayer meetings in his house were proved. If he did belong to an organization, it was one fabricated by the police and entrusted to Babenko. Whether Babenko was under the control of the police or not, he in fact did nothing to compromise himself. At least the police found no evidence other than the confessions taken from some of those arrested.

Those others, all the women and one man, Borzak, did not file an appeal. It is possible of course that their appeals were removed from the case file, because they compromised the police (allegations of torture, for example). Equally possible is that they were broken and so frightened as to be unresponsive to their defence lawyers' suggestion that they, like Belokon', Gavrill Belik, and others, file an appeal. (Women, like men, were routinely beaten in Soviet custody.)⁷ Another possibility is that they chose to stand above the this-worldly mayhem.

In his famous work *The Gulag Archipelago*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn reports a trial of Baptists that took place in Mykytivka, Donets'k Oblast', Ukraine, in January 1964. One of the defendants is 'Bazbei, father of nine children, a miner who had never received any support from the [Trade] Union committee at his [coal-mining] pit because he was a Baptist.' The police isolate one of the daughters from her parents and have her testify against him. At the trial, however, she retracts her testimony against her father: 'The interrogator dictated what I had to say himself.' Zhenya Khloponina closes her statement with the following:

Instead of going to the cinema or to dances, I used to read the Bible and say my prayers – and just for that you are taking my freedom from me. Yes, to be free is a great happiness, but to be free from sin is a greater still. Lenin said that only in Turkey and Russia did such shameful phenomena as religious persecution still exist. I've never been in Turkey and know nothing about it, but how things are in Russia you can see for yourselves.

Khloponina is cut short. 'The defendants accepted their sentences [three to five years in the camps] joyfully, and said a prayer.'⁸

The truth is elusive in the case of the fourteen Adventists: unlike the 1964 case of the Baptists just discussed, there were no independent witnesses at the trial that took place behind closed doors. Nevertheless, the appeals of the seven defendants completely destroyed the prosecution case against an alleged sectarian organization of Reformed Adventists and its anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda. Those who did not appeal may have

⁷See, for example, Mitrokhin, ed., *Dokumenty*, 59 (the case of Vera Fedorovna Shelkova, the wife of the leader of Reformed Adventists, Vladimir Shelkov).

⁸Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, V–VII, trans. Harry Wills (New York, 1978), 515–17 (emphasis in the original).

opposed military service. Yet apart from Borzak, they were all women who faced no call-up, at least in peace time. Nor would Borzak who was 64. Even had they chosen not to work at military factories, it constituted no crime. In any case, their faith was certainly private and not of an organized nature. They did not or could not impose their faith on their own children: Borzak's son worked for the navy, and Il'chnko's son for the army. They met privately, and, because of the private nature of the meetings, the police could not penetrate them, failing to produce any evidence of crime other than the confessions of the defendants. As Belokon' complained, coercion was used to extract the confessions. Moreover, Belokon', the alleged leader of the underground group, would appear to have been an agent provocateur. In short, the crimes of the defendants were never proven.

On 23 January 1953, the MGB officers Vetoshkin, Razumnyi, and Zashchitin, responsible for the present case, adopted a decision to despatch the condemned to the Gulag. On 26 and 27 January 1953, the head of the MGB of Kiev Oblast', Saraev, and the prosecutor of the Kiev Oblast', Malyi, approved the decision, then signed and stamped it (2:427, 457).

None of the appeals discussed here convinced the Supreme Court in Kiev. On 6 February 1953, a month before Stalin died, the Ukrainian Supreme Court turned down all the appeals. Unlike most other documents in this case, this decision was written in the Ukrainian language and signed by Chief Justice Urizchenko and Judges P'iatov and Platko. The procurator of the Ukrainian Republic Vasil'ev and the defence lawyer Perel'muter took part in the discussion. Clearly, Perel'muter was powerless to oppose the powerful machine of Soviet justice. The Supreme Court insisted that the guilt of the condemned was proved by their interrogation records, witnesses' testimonies, and the trial records: they belonged to an 'anti-Soviet, counter-revolutionary' sectarian organization and committed crimes of 'anti-Soviet' agitation. Therefore, the Court concluded, the sentences were appropriate and there were no grounds for review (2:391–5).

The sentences thus confirmed, the fourteen were sent to the Gulag.

In March 1953 Praskov'ia Glivaskaia's property was confiscated and deposited in the state coffer. The court filed a document that the confiscation of the property of the other thirteen did not take place, because there was no property to confiscate (2:396, 397).

Exoneration

A month after their appeals were rejected and their sentences confirmed, Stalin died. Soon after, his successors, led by the feared leader of the secret police Lavrentii Beria, began to initiate a ‘thaw,’ issuing amnesties and releasing people from the Gulag. Fortunately, the fourteen condemned in this case benefitted from this process of de-Stalinization.

More than a year after they were despatched to the Gulag, on 5 June 1954, the General Procuracy of the Soviet Union in Moscow lodged a ‘protest’ against the Ukrainian Supreme Court’s decision on the case of the fourteen Adventists. The procuracy in the Soviet Union was more than the office of public prosecutors. It was charged with the supervision of all governmental and non-governmental organizations and individuals in their adherence to Soviet laws. Here, the procuracy and prosecutors in Moscow (and later in Kiev) acted in the latter role.

In response, the Collegium of the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union in Moscow, consisting of N.K. Morozov (chair), A.M. Ovchinnikova, and M.Ia. Davydova, concluded two days later that even though the guilt of the fourteen defendants was proved in court, the sentences were too harsh: the condemned did not display especial zeal in their anti-Soviet activities, and, with the exception of Darovskii and Gavrill Belik, they had no criminal records. (Borzak’s old ‘crimes’ were not mentioned.) In view of the fact that the majority of the condemned were of advanced age and others semi-literate, their sentences were to be reduced: ten years of correctional labour, with three additional years of deprivation of civil rights and forfeiture of their property, for Belokon’, Gavrill Belik, and Darovskii; and five years of correctional labour for Pilipenko, Praskov’ia Glivaskaia, Ksenia Belik, Il’chenko, Fedorchuk, Babenko, Gavriliuk, Sekletina Glivaskaia, Vasili Brovchenko, and Arkhip Brovchenko (2:471–3).

A year later, in July 1955, Kiev’s KGB (successor to MGB) and procuracy re-examined the sentences of Belokon’, Darovskii, and Gavriil Belik. On 24 July 1955 it concluded that their sentences were to remain in effect (2:475–8). It resolved, however, that following the 27 March 1953 decree ‘On Amnesty’ by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union,⁹ Praskov’ia Glivaskaia, Ksenia Belik, Il’chenko, Fedorchuk,

⁹This decree is published in *Reabilitatsiia: Kak eto bylo. Dokumenty Prezidiuma TsK KPSS i drugie materialy, mart 1953–fevral’ 1956*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 2000), 15.

Babenko, Gavriliuk, Sekletina Glivaskaia, Borzak, Vasilii Brovchenko, and Arkhip Brovchenko were to be released and that, with their release, they were to be considered not convicted (*schitat' ikh neimeiuschimi sudimostj*) in this case (2:471–3). In effect, all but Belokon', Darovskii, and Gavriil Belik were thus exonerated (or ‘rehabilitated,’ to use Soviet parlance).

Gavriil Belik, whose sentence was merely reduced from 25 years to 10, continued to fight for his release from the Gulag. Re-examining his appeal (which is not in the case file), the procuracy in Kiev noted in October 1955: ‘None of the condemned in this case, G.N. Belik included, pleaded guilty either in their preliminary investigations or at the court. They confirmed, however, that they were members of an illegal anti-Soviet organization of “Reformed Adventists,” which G.N. Belik himself does not deny in his appeal’ (2:489). This is extraordinarily odd. The procuracy now stated that all the defendants pleaded *not* guilty, even in the preliminary investigations! The records of the preliminary investigation discussed in chapters 3 and 4 show just the opposite, with the exception of Belokon', who refused to speak. At the trial, all the defendants (again except for Belokon') initially pleaded not guilty, and then some of them, prompted by the prosecution, reversed their pleas to guilty. Moreover, it was Belik who emphatically denied the allegation that he had belonged to any religious organization.

The police and the prosecution probably practised double or triple accounting. It appears that the procuracy, which followed the secret police in framing the present case by fabricating and manipulating evidence, now could not remember its own acts or reconstruct the case it had built.

The procuracy’s farce continued, ignoring Belik’s military service altogether:

In the court, all of them stated that they did not recognize the Soviet laws aimed at strengthening the economic and military might of our Motherland as well as strengthening the defence of the Motherland with arms in hand, and that they could not execute these laws, because they contravened their ‘teaching.’

By not recognizing these laws, they do not recognize the Soviet government as a legitimate government. (2:489)

Thus concluded the assistant prosecutor of special cases in Kiev Oblast', Makosevskii, on 22 October 1955. His conclusion was supported by Prosecutor Malyi (who was involved in this case from the beginning) six days later. Both signed the rejection of Gavriil Belik’s appeal (2:486–90).

It took several more months before Belik's case was re-examined in Moscow. On 2 July 1956, a special commission of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union in Moscow, which was in charge of re-examining cases of political crimes, consisting of V.V. Uzhentsev, I.P. Aleksakhin, B.A. Kuibyshev, K.I. Levich, and K.P. Pankratova, concluded that it was inadvisable to detain Belik in the Gulag. He had been working as a gas-metre reader in a mine in Vorkuta, Russia (almost 3000 kilometres from Bila Tserkva and north of the Arctic circle). He was evaluated as working conscientiously and no infraction of work discipline was observed. Belik was ordered to be released and his conviction removed (2:491, 509).

Unfortunately, no record is extant on the fate of Darovskii and Belokon', except that after the sentencing, Darovskii was despatched to Special Camp no. 7 (Camp Ozernyi) near Irkutsk, East Siberia (2:480). One wonders whether Belokon' may have been secretly exonerated for his apparently invaluable service to the case.

Like millions of other Soviet citizens who suffered injustice, the official rehabilitation of the fourteen Adventists came only towards the end of the Soviet Union, that is, during the period of *glasnot'* and *perestroika* unleashed by the last political leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev.

On 30 November 1988 the General Procuracy of the Soviet Union in Moscow lodged a 'protest' signed by A.Ia. Sukharev. It maintained that the religious activity of the fourteen condemned did not constitute an 'especially dangerous crime against the state' stipulated in the Criminal Code of Ukraine, articles 54-10 and 54-11. The 'protest' was lodged in response to a statement made by one of the defendants, Gavriil Belik, who at the time resided at 13 Novosil's'ka Street, Flat 12, Bila Tserkva, Kiev Oblast' (2:492-5v). (Oddly, in 1989, Belik wrote from 36 Gul'badam Street, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, to the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union in Moscow asking for a document certifying his incarceration and its length in the 1950s, which he needed to receive his pension. In it he said that he was detained for two months before the sentencing on 16 December 1952 and was released in the autumn of 1956 [2:502]. If he is right, he was detained and interrogated for a month before he was formally arrested. In any event, a month later, the KGB in Kiev reported that it had no records of his incarceration and referred him to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In the end, another two months later, the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal

Affairs finally certified that Belik had been arrested on 18 November 1952 and released from the Vorkuta Camp on 14 July 1956 [2:503, 509].

The procuracy's 'protest' was accepted by the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union on 23 February 1989. All the fourteen defendants were officially exonerated on the grounds that their actions did not constitute a crime.¹⁰ The Supreme Court's examination revealed some interesting information. Like the 22 October 1955 document of the Ukrainian procuracy, this document of the Supreme Court stated that all the defendants 'categorically denied both in the preliminary investigation and at the trial that they had conducted anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda.' Whether the Supreme Court merely followed the procuracy document or whether it examined the secret documents of this file is not known. The court agreed that the defendants had met for the purpose of performing religious rites and reading religious books. It stated, however, that the case records had not established that the literature was anti-Soviet. Nor, the court added, had the witnesses provided evidence of anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda. In short, the court concluded, this case did not constitute an 'especially dangerous crime against the state.' The court commented further that refusals to work on Saturdays were a matter of 'disciplinary responsibility' and refusals to serve in the Soviet Army a matter of 'criminal responsibility.' The court concluded that the police investigators had failed to establish refusal of military service by the defendants (2:496–9).

All the defendants were thus exonerated. Unfortunately, it appears that the Soviet government made no effort to find the accused (if alive) or their families and relatives and notify them of their official rehabilitation. Nothing is known about their fate after they were despatched to the Gulag, except for that of Gavriil Belik.

The story of the fourteen defendants does not end here. A new twist emerged shortly after their full rehabilitation that suggests a startling possibility in an already complex plot. It turns out that in 1993 Vasiliy Brovchenko, the youngest defendant in the present case and 68 in 1993,

¹⁰ All thirteen defendants but Belokon' are on the published list of the rehabilitated people in Kiev Oblast'. See *Reabilitovani istoieieiu: Kyivs'ka oblast'*. Knyha druhia (Kiev, 2006), 41, 42–3, 45, 48, 53, 73, 92, 96, 120, 945. Darovskii was exonerated twice, for 1937 and 1952. Because the list is unlikely to be complete, Belokon's absence may not be significant. It may also mean that Belokon' indeed was a police provocateur and that his rehabilitation is therefore incomplete. Nor does his name appear on the published list of the rehabilitated in Vinnytsia Oblast'.

was living in the city of Bila Tserkva. It appears that in 1993 not everything had been cleared in Brovchenko's case and so he sent an enquiry to Kiev from Bila Tserkva. The Kiev Oblast' court requested the *third* volume of the case file from the SBU (the successor to the KGB). After examining that volume, the court merely declared that Brovchenko was 'rehabilitated' in 1989 (2:511, 512, 527). What is this volume and what is contained in it that required that it be held separately from the other two volumes and never referred to anywhere else by anyone? Why did the court request the third volume four years after the 1989 exoneration? Was Brovchenko, too, somehow used by the police for reasons that could not be disclosed?

In all likelihood, Brovchenko worked (or was coerced to work) for the police at one time. It is possible that when he was arrested, he felt betrayed and decided to fight. He was intimidated, threatened, and possibly tortured. So his resolve did not always hold. If Brovchenko had worked for the police at one time, one inevitably wonders how many of the defendants who did not appeal their verdicts did as well.

There is an even stranger possibility. The developments in the case may have been carefully plotted by the secret police and the prosecution, including the appeals themselves. Some of the defendants, particularly Vasiliiv Brovchenko, the youngest of the defendants, and Ivan Babenko, the oldest, may have been broken by the police and cooperated throughout the process. If so, they had done so in return for promises of a lighter sentence. They would be tried, convicted, and sentenced *in camera*. (Brovchenko would even be allowed to challenge the prosecution in court, probably in order to cover up his collaboration with the police.) Then they would appeal their verdicts. Whether or not their appeals led to an official commutation of their sentences, they would be released secretly or exiled to an area they preferred. It is possible that the police did not keep their side of the bargain faithfully, and that some of the defendants felt betrayed and decided to fight in the end. (In any case, these documents, including the case file itself, would never become public. So whatever the contradictions and inconsistencies, they were unimportant to the police and the prosecution.) And, even if Belokon' worked for the police all along, he himself might not have been a party to such a contrived police plot.

Surely, this construction of events is too complicated and bizarre to be credible. Yet the Soviet secret police routinely went to such extraordinary

lengths. The chief defendant of the 1930 show trial of the ‘Industrial Party,’ Leonid K. Ramzin, a prominent engineer and professor, faithfully followed a scenario dictated by the Kremlin at the trial and readily admitted the ‘counter-revolutionary crimes’ of himself and his co-defendants. He was sentenced to death. He then appealed for commutation, obviously according to the pre-existing scenario. His sentence was commuted to ten years of imprisonment, again according to plan. Ramzin was allowed to continue his work in the Gulag, also according to the scenario. He was subsequently amnestied, survived the Great Terror, and was even awarded a Stalin Prize in 1943.¹¹

The defendants at the three famous Moscow show trials (1936–8), who were hardened Old Bolsheviks, surrendered to Stalin and accepted his false accusations. There may have been bargains between the defendants and Stalin’s prosecution team about the eventual commutation of their capital sentences, but Stalin did not keep them. Stalin had most of the defendants, including all the chief ones, executed. As Arthur Koestler wrote in *Darkness at Noon*, at least some of them consciously accepted Stalin’s lies and sacrificed their lives to the cause of the revolution.

The 1973 trial of Viktor Krasin, a Soviet human-rights activist, is a good example. A native of Kiev and a veteran of the Gulag under Stalin, Krasin was broken by the KGB and cooperated with the secret police in the 1973 trial of himself and Petr Iakir, another prominent human-rights activist. Krasin incriminated himself and others of crimes they had not committed. According to a plan arranged beforehand, he appealed his verdict after the trial and was treated leniently. Subsequently, he was even allowed to emigrate to the United States. After emigration, however, Krasin wrote a book about his capitulation to the Soviet police as an atonement.¹²

The Soviet police went to such lengths as these because they understood the importance of ideas and faith. The question of whether or not any of the defendants of the 1952 trial in Bila Tserkva was a police agent

¹¹ “Svoi dnevniki ia rassmatrivaia kak otsenku riadovogo grazhdanina plenennoi Rossii” (Protess “Prompartii” v dnevniku inzhenera I.Ia. Popova), *Otechestvennye arkhivy*, 1998, no. 2, 45.

¹² Viktor Krasin, *Sud* (New York, 1983). This important work has not been translated into English. There is an adapted excerpt, however: Victor Krasin, ‘How I Was Broken by the K.G.B.,’ *The New York Times Magazine*, 18 March 1984.

and whether any of them collaborated with the police at the trial does not negate the possibility that among the defendants there were devout and principled believers. However private their faith may have been, the police deemed them politically dangerous.

Conclusion and Epilogue

The key to human happiness
Is to nurture wisdom in your heart,
For man to attend to man's business
And let the gods play their part:
Above all, to stand in awe
Of the eternal, unalterable law.

Sophocles¹

STALIN DIED on 5 March 1953, shortly after the defendants were convicted and despatched to the Gulag. A year later, in 1954, as discussed in the previous chapter, Moscow intervened to have their sentences commuted. This move by Moscow disquieted the Ukrainian authorities in Kiev. In August 1954, G.E. Grishko, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Kiev Oblast', wrote a memorandum to N.V. Podgornyi, the second secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine, to express his dismay at Moscow's action. To Grishko, the confessions of the defendants made their crimes indisputable. He read an excerpt from the case file. Fedorchuk, for example, said: 'We live on earth temporarily and we believe in the afterlife. We recognize the Soviet government and obey its laws only in so far as they do not contravene divine law . . . We regard as enemies all those who don't believe in God. I plead guilty that I didn't obey the Soviet laws because they contradicted my religious convictions. I shall never renounce my faith, because I want to receive eternal life.' And Gavriliuk: 'We cannot bear arms for the defence of the Soviet government, we can't serve in the Soviet Army or work at military factories, because we have no enemies. All people on earth are our brethren. We consider our enemies all those who don't believe in the Word of God.' Grishko complained that these people were lawfully and justly punished by the Soviet Court and therefore the commutation of their sentences was unwarranted.²

¹ *Antigone*, trans. Don Taylor (London, 2006), 55.

² TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, spr. 3599, ark. 144–6.

Whether Podgornyi responded to Grishko's complaint is not known. Two months after the compliant, the Ukrainian Supreme Court reviewed Moscow's judgement and concluded against Grishko that Moscow was justified.³

Undoubtedly, Grishko had not read the entire case file. Even if he had done so, his views would not have been different: they were predetermined. Likewise, careless readers looking for heroes and dissidents may reach the same conclusion that the defendants of the 1952 Bila Tserkva trial were believers who dared to challenge the atheist government.⁴

The reading discussed in this book argues that the case against the Adventists in Bila Tserkva was not so clear-cut as their accusers made out. No doubt, they took the Fourth Commandment seriously and observed the Saturday Sabbath (and therefore were called 'Saturdayists'). As fellow-believers, they sought out and helped each other. Apart from these facts, little else about their alleged 'anti-Soviet' faith can be confirmed. Their alleged refusal to serve in the Soviet Army on the grounds of their religious convictions was not proved. Nor were their religious agitation and propagandizing. Coercion was used to obtain confessions of guilt. There were police informers and provocateurs within the alleged sect of Reformed Adventists, even in a provincial town like Bila Tserkva. I have suggested that the chief defendant, Belokon', was himself a police agent. So was the local presbyter of the Adventist Church. The Soviet police sought any means to invade the most private and personal spheres of these private people. In this sense, the lives of these Adventists are merely a microcosm of those of the Soviet people in general.

The only defendants who clearly stated that they followed their religious convictions were Pilipenko (54 years of age) and Arkhip Brovchenko (64). Pilipenko said in his appeal: 'I acknowledge the Soviet government as a legitimate government and submit myself to it in all matters

³Ibid., ark. 151–5.

⁴In this regard, books drawing heavily and uncritically on prosecutorial materials should be read with utmost caution. See, for example, Kramola: *Inakomyslie v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve, 1953–1982 gg.: Rassekrechennye dokumenty Verkhovnogo suda i Prokuratury SSSR*, ed. V.A. Kozlova, S.V. Mironenko (Moscow, 2005) and its English edition: *Sedition: Everyday Resistance in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev and Brezhnev* (New Haven, CT, 2011). For a critical analysis of a case of dissent that predates Stalin's death in 1953, see Benjamin Nathans, 'The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol'pin and the Idea of Rights under "Developed Socialism,"' *Slavic Review* 66:4 (2007), 630–3.

except when it contravenes the Law of God.' Yet he was a war veteran!

Arkhip Brovchenko, too, said in his appeal: 'In professing the teaching of "Reformed Adventists," I believe that one cannot transgress the Commandment "Thou shalt not kill." In my belief, the violation of the Commandment would deprive me of an eternal afterlife in the future, after my death. I have no specific goal of weakening the might of the Soviet government.' Brovchenko had a certificate of exemption from military duties, however old it may have been.

Darovskii, 65 years of age, who had been convicted twice before for his faith, did not explicitly say that he would not obey the Soviet laws that contradicted his faith, but he did say in his appeal that he recognized 'the Soviet government and follow[ed] it as our legitimate government, installed by God': 'I perform all requirements, pay tax and all things the government demands of me, according to my religious convictions.' He was forced to live with the Soviet regime on terms dictated by it, but he had not abandoned his religious convictions.

Although some of the accused *may* have privately held 'anti-Soviet' sentiments, and police provocation did exist, there was no evidence that there was an 'organization.' The only defendant who actually mentioned the term 'Reformed Adventists' used by the police and the prosecution was Arkhip Brovchenko. Although he knew and followed their teaching, no evidence surfaced that he maintained organizational ties to the underground group (wherever such may have existed in 1952). The police, as before the war, continued to employ agents provocateurs to create an imaginary 'anti-Soviet' sectarian organization. It was they who gave a semblance of 'organization' to people who practised their faith privately.⁵ The Soviet government could not have possibly held a show trial or even

⁵ Informers and provocateurs were used widely in other areas as well. See, for example, Dina Kaminskaia, *Zapiski adwokata* (Benson, VT, 1984), 38–41 and Hiroaki Kuromiya, "'Political Youth Opposition in Late Stalinism': Evidence and Conjecture,' *Europe-Asia Studies* 55:4 (June 2003) and "'Re-examining Opposition under Stalin': Further Thoughts,' *Europe-Asia Studies* 56:2 (March 2004). Their elaborate deployment was ubiquitous in post-war Eastern Europe as well. In Poland, for example, the Catholic Church, the spiritual symbol of resistance to the Communist regime, was deeply penetrated by the police. See, for example, Tadeusz Isakowicz-Zaleski, *Księża wobec bezpieczeństwa na przykładzie archidiecezji krakowskiej* (Cracow, 2007) and *Kościół katolicki w czasach komunistycznej dyktatury: Między bohaterstwem a agenturą*, vols. 1–2 (Cracow, 2007–8).

a public trial against the accused, for the evidence it had was fabricated and the defendants could have easily disclosed the falsehoods of the prosecution. Indeed, some of the defendants dropped a bombshell or two at the Bila Tserkva trial, exploding the prosecution case. (All the same, they were convicted.) A public trial of pacifists would only have propagated the idea of pacifism among the Soviet public.

Conflict between secular and divine law is nothing new. Secular authorities have always persecuted spiritual authorities when the latter stood in the former's way. Religious pacifism is a good example. All governments have had to deal with it. Historically, democratic regimes have mostly accepted pacifism within strictly defined parameters, whereas dictatorships have generally persecuted it. The Soviet government, after briefly tolerating pacifism, outlawed it. In fact, the Soviet government, the first modern atheist regime to withstand counter-revolution, was the first to attempt to eliminate all religions and all ecclesiastical authorities. Religion posed a moral, existential alternative to the Soviet order and competed with Marxism for the soul of each citizen.

True, the Soviet government guaranteed freedom of conscience, but on paper only. It went further than any other modern government to challenge all forms of religion in all spheres of life. The French Revolution was anti-clerical, but many leaders, notably Maximilien Robespierre (1758–94), were deists; Robespierre devised a new religion (the cult of the Supreme Being). Adolf Hitler never negated Christianity in general and even admired the military traditions of Muslims, although his regime, like Stalin's, persecuted religious groups it deemed politically dangerous and inexpedient.⁶

The Second World War blunted Stalin's push for an atheist society. By then Stalin had apparently come to understand the need for a new, Soviet priesthood to attend to the spiritual needs of Soviet citizens, and to mobilize them for victory in the war. He also came to understand the political utility of the ecclesiastical order for his vision of a post-war Europe. When his plan stalled, his interest in religion declined sharply and the persecution of religion intensified anew. The trial of the fourteen Adventists discussed in the present book took place against this backdrop.

⁶Christine Elizabeth King, *The Nazi State and the New Religions: Five Case Studies in Non-Conformity* (New York, 1982), 231–8 lists the small sects banned by the Nazis.

Although the souls of the defendants had not been subsumed into the Soviet mould, they had surely learnt how to live with the Soviet regime. Isolated from the legally operating Adventist congregations, they kept their faith private and within their families. With the clergy gone, this was inevitable: the lay believers sustained the faith.⁷ There was no evidence that they practised any missionary activism in their religious life. Their faith was covert. Many chose not to work for any institutions that required them to work on Saturdays and consequently lived in destitution. Their lives could hardly be classified as those led in opposition or resistance to the Soviet system, or as a challenge to Soviet laws. They sought an ontological exit from the atheist world in their private religious universe.

Soviet authorities thought otherwise. They equated nonconformism with active ‘anti-Soviet’ propaganda and agitation. They presented the 1952 trial of the fourteen Adventists as a confrontation between divine and Soviet laws. They misrepresented the believers and their lives and fabricated evidence to criminalize them. Using provocateurs and withholding inconvenient facts and evidence, the police made the defendants out to be political criminals and presented to the court superficially convincing records of their ‘crimes.’ These inconsistencies are key to detecting the fabrication of crime.

The accusers (the police and the prosecution) in the end were caught up in a predicament of their own making. Seeking to account for the contradictions, and patch up the inconsistencies, arising from their abject pursuit of the Adventists, they lost track of their own lies, thus eventually revealing the fabricated nature of the case.

Why did the police go to such lengths to criminalize people whose faith was private and posed no apparent political threat? It was because there was always the possibility of even a deeply private faith becoming public. Moreover, no one could completely control ideas themselves: ideas have a way of spreading in one way or another. Stalin’s secret police

⁷This was the case with religion in general when institutions came under attack. For the French case, see Suzanne Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France* (Ithaca, NY, 1990), and for the Soviet case, see Glennys Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia: Religious Activists in the Village* (University Park, PA, 1997) and Gregory L. Freeze, ‘The Stalinist Assault on the Parish, 1929–1941,’ in Manfred Hildermeier, ed., *Stalinismus vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg: Neue Wege der Forschung* (Munich, 1998).

wished to leave no loose ends. Any threat was inflated and, if need be, non-existent threats were created.

Stalin knew well that he could not completely control ideas. In 1944, he admitted frankly that even after twenty-six years of Soviet rule, it could not be said that 90 per cent of the Soviet population supported the Soviet government.⁸ Stalin also knew that it was impossible to know for sure what was in the minds of the people. He was frank about it. In a conversation with Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang kai-shek's son, in Moscow in January 1946, Stalin discussed his mistake about the outcome of the British election of 1945. In the summer of 1945, Stalin had believed that the Conservative Party in Britain, headed by Winston Churchill, the man who led the nation to victory over Germany, would win, but Stalin had been proved wrong: Churchill lost to the Labour Party. Stalin cautioned that in a divided China, where there were no elections, '*it is difficult to know what the people think.*' In the same conversation Stalin emphasized to Chang that if opposition were not represented in the government through elections, it would resort to illegal struggle.⁹

Stalin admittedly failed to understand the minds of the people in a free country like Britain. How, then, could he know what the people thought in a country without free elections, free polls, the free press, and other means of fathoming their mood? He could not. Did he suspect that there was dissent in the country? He certainly insisted that this was so. Since Stalin could not introduce an electoral system into the one-party, one-man dictatorship, the ubiquitous deployment of the secret police and their agents and informers took the place of free elections. Instead of elections, Stalin used the secret police to probe the minds of the people and control dissent.

All the same, non-conformist ideas survived and spread in various ways. How the private faith of the Reformed Adventists surfaced can be seen from the example of the Adventist 'Vasili Glugowsky' (a pseudonym),

⁸'Stalin i Pol'sha, 1943–1944 gody. Iz rasskrychennykh dokumentov rossiiskikh arkhivov,' *Novaia i noveishaiia istoriia*, 2008, no. 3, 127.

⁹'Stalin i Chan kaishi: Sekretnaia missiia syna Chan Kaishi v Moskvu. Dekabr' 1945–ianvar' 1946 g.,' *Novaia i noveishaiia istoriia*, 1996, no. 4, pp. 123–4 (emphasis added). Likewise, Stalin's right-hand man, Viacheslav Molotov confessed in 1972, 25 years after the fact, that 'to this day I cannot understand how he [Churchill] lost the election in 1945! I need to know English life better.' *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics* (Chicago, IL, 1993), 59.

'one of 14 young Adventists from a certain village [in the Soviet Union], who were drafted into the army in 1944.' Seven of them were determined to go to the battlefield, the other seven refused to bear arms, obeying the Sixth Commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill.' Vasili was one of the latter group. These seven were tried and sentenced to ten years in prison:

When their minister, Afanasi Miriuka, heard about the problem, he came to talk them out of such a stand. Realizing that all his efforts were in vain, he finally said in their presence: 'Among us we have seven idiots who refuse to bear arms and fight. They, instead, prefer to go to prison and suffer.' The minister strongly defended the position taken by the SDA [Seventh-Day Adventist] Church. At that time Vasili was not yet baptized in the SDA Church, and he knew nothing about the SDA Reform Movement. But he had wholeheartedly adopted the Adventist faith.

When Vasili returned home from prison, the minister – the same one that had visited those seven while they were in prison – said to Vasili that, if he wanted to be baptized, he would first have to sign a declaration repudiating his previous attitude when he refused to bear arms and go to war. Unless he was prepared to admit that he had acted incorrectly, said the minister, he could not become a member of the SDA Church. Vasili never changed his position and, eventually, an exception was made in his behalf, and he was baptized into the Adventist Church.

Before long Vasili heard about the SDA Reform Movement and wanted to know exactly what had caused the split. Having heard all the pros and cons from both sides and being satisfied in his conscience, he decided to join the Movement two years later.¹⁰

Word of the Reform Movement somehow spread. It is no wonder, as discussed earlier (see p. 50), that the Soviet secret police kept vigil against any 'anti-Soviet' tendency among the Adventists – the Reform movement of pacifists. 'Vasili Glugowsky' himself was arrested again for his 'missionary activity' and sentenced to five years in prison and five years in exile.¹¹

Stalin understood the strength of ideas and beliefs. He knew that he could not easily exterminate and uproot all ideas and beliefs he deemed

¹⁰ A. Balbach, *The History of the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement* (Roanoke, VA, 1999), 395–6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 396. After a year in prison, however, he was amnestied, probably because of the death of Stalin.

dangerous. ‘In 1929 Stalin defended the famous play by Mikhail Bulgakov *Days of the Turbins* (or *The White Guard*), one of his favourites, which sympathetically described the anti-Red Turbins in Kiev during the civil war of 1918–20, because, according to Stalin, it demonstrated to the audience the ‘all-conquering power of Bolshevism’ (*vsesokrushaiushchaya sila bolshevizma*).’¹²

A comparison with Franz Kafka is enlightening here. While Kafka described a metaphysical power that was difficult to see and comprehend, Bulgakov, as Stalin saw it, depicted a concrete power that allowed no room for resistance. Stalin might have applauded the ultimate capitulation of Kafka’s protagonist ‘Joseph K.’ to the power that arrested and persecuted him, but he would not have approved of Joseph K.’s submission to a metaphysical power that he could not confront. For Stalin, it could not be just any power; it had to be the ‘all-conquering power of Bolshevism.’ There is no evidence that Stalin was familiar with Kafka.¹³ Nor is it known whether Kafka, an atheist socialist who died in 1924, seven years after the Bolshevik Revolution, was aware of the reality of the first socialist state in the world. After Stalin’s death, however, Kafka became known in the Soviet Union, and ‘was welcomed as a voice with a great deal to contribute about the real spiritual condition of Soviet society of the Stalin years.’¹⁴

The defendants of the 1952 Bila Tserkva trial were apparently broken by the ‘all-conquering power of Bolshevism.’ They were frightened into self-incrimination. They would have been condemned to oblivion had they not been given the opportunity to speak at the trial and to make use of the appellate procedure of the Soviet juridical system. In this sense, the post-war Soviet Union was sharply different from the pre-war years of the Great Terror, in which people were executed without formality.

At least some of the defendants marshalled enough courage *not* to incriminate themselves at the stage of preliminary investigation. Yet they were broken in the end and pled guilty. (Moreover, if the post-Stalin investigations are to be believed, they may not have pled guilty at all: all the

¹²Hiroaki Kuromiya, *The Voices of the Dead: Stalin’s Great Terror in the 1930s* (New Haven and London, 2007), 253.

¹³Kafka came to be known in the Soviet Union only after Stalin’s death. See Emily Hall, ‘Who’s Afraid of Franz Kafka? Kafka Criticism in the Soviet Union,’ *Slavic Review* 35:3 (September 1976), 484–503.

¹⁴Edith W. Clowes, ‘Kafka and Russian Experimental Fiction in the Thaw, 1956–1965,’ *The Modern Language Review* 89:1 (January 1994), 164.

guilty pleas appear to have been fabricated by the police and the prosecutors.) Yet then, during the trial, they again protested their innocence. All (but Belokon', who refused to speak) pled *not guilty* on the grounds of their religious convictions. During the trial, however, some of them were intimidated into submission, while others remained defiant. The court records as well as those of pre-trial investigations were doctored here and there in order to make the prosecution case credible. Still, the tampering was not consistent, and the protests of some defendants were recorded, and, unwittingly or not, many contradictions and inconsistencies remain in the file.

After the trial, some of the defendants loudly protested their innocence in their appeals to the higher court. In the end, no one, not even the prosecution, appeared sure of exactly what had taken place. In describing who had pled guilty at such and such a stage, for example, the prosecutors ended up contradicting their own earlier accounts.

In the process of assisting the defendants to fight against the Soviet system of predetermined justice, the defence lawyer Perel'muter in particular was instrumental, even if he proved to be powerless against the state. All the defendants (save Belokon') who appealed were represented by him. He was almost certainly not paid at all for his work.¹⁵ He was probably one of those old defence lawyers who had somehow maintained a degree of professionalism throughout the years of Stalin's terror.¹⁶

To complicate the matter, as discussed earlier, there is the possibility that all or many of these developments, including the appeals themselves, were planned by the secret police in advance. Some of the defendants were certainly exploited by the police to convict the others. Yet this does not mean that the faith of those others was not genuine. It merely signifies human frailty in the face of state violence.

¹⁵ Defence counsel S.S. Kozlov requested of the Kiev Oblast' court that an honorarium be allotted from the property of Proskov'ia Glivaskaia at 92 Railway Settlement Line Four in the city of Bila Tserkva to defray expenses for legal consultation. His undated supplication contained a note to the effect that 'the remaining six' (Belokon', Gavriliuk, Pilipenko, Sekletina Glivaskaia, Borzak, and Ksenia Belik) had no property at all (2:372). Nor had the other seven defendants any property. So the defence lawyer, Perel'muter, who represented them, was likely not paid at all.

¹⁶ On this point, see Dina Kaminskaia, *Zapiski advokata* (Benson, VT, 1984), 10, 19. These lawyers (*advokaty*) were not employed or paid by the Soviet government. They constituted a self-governing organization, an exceptional existence under Stalin. For the Soviet legal profession in the pre-war era, see Eugene Huskey, *Russian Lawyers and the Soviet State: The Origins and Development of the Soviet Bar, 1917–1939* (Princeton, NJ, 1986).

Faith and Calamity

From the case file of the Bila Tserkva trial alone, it is difficult to fathom what impact the brutal collectivization of agriculture and the Great Famine, with the attendant destruction of churches, had on the religiosity of the Soviet people. Sergei Borzak's case is suggestive, however. His life, like those of others, went through such dramatic changes in the early 1930s that he struggled for survival and simply had no time for spiritual practice (see p. 78). Earlier it was discussed that the result of the 1937 census surprised the Soviet political leaders with the persistence of popular religiosity (see p. 36). The Great Terror, which began shortly after the 1937 census was taken, killed numerous clerics and believers and eliminated untold numbers of churches and sects. The case file of Bila Tserkva Adventists contains some indications that the Great Terror, far from killing religion, strengthened it. Ksenia Belik, for instance, became a believer in 1937 at the age of 38 (see p. 82). She and her husband, who died a believer in 1942, began to raise their son Gavriil as a believer in 1937, during the Terror (see p. 170).

Somewhat ironically, the Gulag itself fostered religious sentiment. Many believers who survived Stalin's terror were incarcerated in the Gulag before the war and again after the war. Darovskii, for example, who was a believer, got to know the Baptists in the Gulag, adding to his already strong religious sentiment. Similar experiences abound in the Gulag. During and after the war the Gulag was replete with believers, many of whom were foreign (German, Italian, Hungarian, Polish, Japanese, and so on) as well as people from the Baltic states, Western Ukraine, Western Belarus', and other newly incorporated areas of the Soviet Union who had never been subjected to the Soviet persecution of religion and had retained their faiths.¹⁷ Their incarceration and exile to remote areas of the Soviet Union had the unexpected effect of spreading faiths (such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and other Protestant sects) where such faiths had previously been unknown.

The Gulag had the opposite effect as well. The case of the defendant Gavriil Belik is instructive. He came to reject at least part of the Adventist

¹⁷This is described in many Gulag memoirs as well as in the classic work of Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, 3 vols. (New York, 1974–8).

teaching. By faithfully following it, he had ended up in the Gulag and suffered years of hell. After his release, he did not discard his faith completely: even when he served in the military, he observed the Saturday Sabbath. Yet he rejected other dictates of divine law as preached by the Reformed Adventists: he served in the military, took up arms, drank, smoked, and went to the cinema and theatre.

It is not difficult to imagine that the Second World War had the same effect on other Soviet citizens as well, leaving them disillusioned about their faiths, which had failed them and their families during the war, especially in the occupied territory of the Soviet Union, including Ukraine and Bila Tserkva.

Others seem to have blamed the calamity of their families and their nation on the lack of true faith. Some, having served in the war, returned to a life committed to religion. Stefan Kulakov, for example, was from an old Adventist family. His father Petr Kulakov was one of the pioneers of the Adventist Church in the Russian Empire and was repeatedly arrested under Stalin.¹⁸ Stefan fought in the Second World War. At the front, Stefan experienced a spiritual conversion. There he reportedly recognized God and was overwhelmed by his desire to share the joy of his new life with the Lord. After he returned home, he ignored the warnings of his brother Mikhail that they were surrounded by informers and provocateurs. Stefan and Mikhail were arrested in 1948 on charges of ‘anti-Soviet’ propaganda. Stefan became seriously ill while serving the sentence in Vorkuta. He was released from the Gulag in 1953, only to die shortly thereafter.¹⁹ Mikhail subsequently became the leader of the officially approved Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the Soviet Union. In Vinnytsia, Ukraine, a former captain in the Soviet Army became pastor of the Adventist Church.²⁰ In

¹⁸ See Marite Sapiets, *True Witness: The Story of Seventh-Day Adventists in the Soviet Union* (Keston, Eng., [1990?]), 275 and M. Kulakov, ‘Tserkov’ i mech gosudarstva,’ *Gosudarstvennaya bezopasnost’ i demokratiia*, no. 2, March 1993. Petr Kulakov had belonged to the officially sanctioned Seventh-Day Adventist Church. According to the ‘True and Free Adventists’ (see p. 48), Kulakov had converted to the Reformist position in jail under the influence of its leader Vladimir Shelkov. After he was released, however, Kulakov had reverted to his old position and began to attack the Reformists. Kulakov was expelled from the True and Free Adventist Church. See N. Mitrokhin, ed., *Dokumenty po istorii Vsesoiuznoi tserkvi Vernykh i Svobodnykh Adventistov Sed’mogo Dnia* (VTs VSASD) (Moscow, 1995), 46–7.

¹⁹ Kulakov, ‘Tserkov’ i mech gosudarstva,’ 55–6.

²⁰ Sapiets, *True Witness*, 62. For other similar cases, see Mitrokhin, ed., *Dokumenty*, 9,

Kirovohrad, a decorated war veteran, 44 years of age, was ordained as a minister in 1950 while maintaining his Communist Party membership, causing a scandal.²¹

There were even more dramatic cases. Aleksandr Semenovich Guk (Aleksandr Semenovych Huk), a resident of Settlement Hukivka, Protopopivka Village, Derhachi District, Kharkiv Oblast', Ukraine, was a former member of the Communist Party. In 1942, during the war, Guk converted to Christianity and attempted to renounce his Soviet citizenship. According to Soviet authorities, he wrote to the American ambassador, Walter Bedell Smith, in Moscow asking for help with emigration. The following is a letter, dated 2 June 1948, addressed to the chair of Derhachi District Soviet authorities 'Malianik,' and copied to Ambassador Smith, from the 'proponent of Evangelical Christians and Baptists' Guk. Invoking the Gospels, the Stalin constitution, and universal human rights, the petition made a sophisticated argument:

I, Aleksandr Semenovich Guk, born in 1908 to a poor peasant family, worked until 1928 with my father in the field. From 1928 to 1930 I worked for the police and from 1930 through 1944 I worked in the Protopopivka Village Soviet, first as its Secretary then as its Chairman and was a member of the All Union Communist Party (VKP[b]) from 1938 to 1944.

In 1942 I experienced a spiritual rebirth. I was born again, as all men should be reborn of the Spirit (John 3:3, 5, 7). I became a believer in Jesus Christ and took water baptism (1 Peter 3:21). It's not I that live, but in me lives Christ the Lord Creator and our God. The Holy Spirit revealed itself to me that the Gospels are the highest and the mightiest teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, the most spiritual and the most truthful eternal teaching. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11). Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12)

Therefore I did not want to be a Communist. The VKP(b) does not believe in God and does not recognize Jesus Christ as the Son of God. On 8 February 1944 I made the decision [to declare my

²⁸⁵ and ²⁸⁷.

²¹TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, spr. 1950, ark. 13–14.

faith] and was expelled from the party for my faith. From this time on, the Soviet government began to persecute me.

(I). For the fact that I believed in God and did not wish to stay in the party, I was fired from my work as the Secretary of the Village Soviet (Protocol no. 12 of the 4 February 1944 session of the Village Soviet Executive Committee) and as the keeper of the collective farm '*Shliakh do sotsializmu*' ('Road to Socialism') (Protocol no. 19 of 12 October 1944 session of the Board of the farm).

(II). I retired on a pension as an invalid worker and received a pension until April 1948. On 15 April 1948 I was arrested by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and State Security as a preacher of Evangelical Christians. I was interrogated for seven days and was released, because I was innocent.

(III). After this incident, according to the instruction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and State Security, I was sent to be re-certified as an invalid, and was relegated to the third-degree invalid instead of the first degree. I was denied the pension, which I have not received since 1 April. At this time my family (there are five of us, myself, my wife, and our three children) are deprived of crumbs of bread and daily subsistence. All this happened to us in spite of the freedom of conscience in the Soviet Union stipulated in Article 124 in the Constitution and free democracy.

At this time we are faced with the problem of what to do with our family and our homechurch (we are all believers), because we have been fired and are not allowed to work, the pension was terminated and we are prohibited from preaching evangelism. We decided unanimously: to ask the Derhachi District Soviet of Workers' Deputies to write a petition to the higher instances of the Soviet government that we be stripped of all the rights of Soviet citizens and expelled from the Soviet Union. We wish to leave the family of the Soviet government. We all decided to petition the embassy of the USA in Moscow and Mr Smith that he ask the US government to accept five of us to America as the family of a proponent of Evangelical Christians and Baptists. We ask both parties to satisfy our request and protect us from attack according to the universal rights of citizens. The basis of our statement is Matthew 10:23.²²

²² 'But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.'

The matter of Aleksandr Guk was given to the secret police for investigation.²³

Whether this petition was actually written by Guk is not known. Nor is it known what happened to Guk eventually. (Almost certainly Guk did not succeed in emigrating to the United States.) If this story is credible, it suggests an interesting example of conversion that took place under the impact of the war. Derhachi is located just outside the city of Kharkiv, the capital of Ukraine until 1934. The area was occupied by the German forces in October 1941. After a series of fierce battles, it was liberated briefly in February 1943, but it soon fell to German hands again. It was liberated finally in August 1943. Guk did not say what he did during the occupation. As a party member and an important official of the village, however, he was undoubtedly in mortal danger. He became a believer in 1942, during the occupation period. Maybe he fought in the Red Army and was wounded. Maybe he was trapped in Derhachi and sought to survive the occupation by masking his identity. Maybe he evacuated with the Red Army to the Soviet hinterland (because he said that he was a Protopopivka village soviet official through 1944) and pondered on the world and his life there. There is little doubt that it was the war and occupation that changed him, turning his world view upside down. Religious practices died hard in Derhachi. In the first half of 1947, for instance, of the 706 births recorded there, 365, or 51 per cent, of the infants were given baptism. In the same period, 1014 deaths took place in Derhachi. Of them, 466, or 45 per cent, of the deceased received church burials.²⁴

Vladimir Nesterovich Boiko (Volodymyr Nestorovych Boiko) presents another interesting case. He was a Ukrainian of a working-class background and 30 years of age in 1954 when his story was reported by G.E. Grishko, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Kiev Oblast', in the same memorandum in which he protested the commutation of the sentences of the Bila Tserkva Adventists. Boiko had attended Kiev State University, but did not finish. He fought in the Red Army from 1941 to 1945. Yet, after the war, he became a preacher of Pentecostals (*triasuny*, those Pentecostals who practised 'glossolalia,' or speaking in tongues). In 1948 Boiko was arrested and charged with illegal sectarian activities (which included spreading 'provocative counter-revolutionary falsehoods against

²³ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 5069, ark. 276-8.

²⁴ Ibid., ark. 381-2.

the Soviet government,’ ‘agitating against serving in the Soviet Army or working on collective farms and factories,’ and ‘refusing to recognize the Soviet government’). On 24 March 1952, eight months before the fourteen Adventists were arrested, he was tried and sentenced by the Kiev Oblast’ court to ten years of imprisonment, the deprivation of his civil rights for another five years, and the confiscation of all his property.²⁵

Yet, to the chagrin of Grishko, on 28 May 1954, the Supreme Court of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in Kiev commuted Boiko’s sentence to five years of imprisonment on the grounds that he was ill with tuberculosis and that his role in the sect was not active enough to warrant a prolonged isolation from Soviet society. (He had by then been isolated for more than five years.) Moreover, the court released Boiko from incarceration based on the amnesty decree of 1953 and on the grounds that he was a war veteran. Grishko complained that there was enough incriminating evidence of Boiko’s crime. Boiko, according to Grishko, repeatedly stated that ‘he was very sorry that he had served in the Soviet Army and that now he would under no circumstances tolerate serving in the Soviet Army and would under no circumstances renounce his religious convictions.’ Grishko added that Boiko did not appeal the original verdict of the court to the higher instances, suggesting that he knew he was guilty. The day after he was released, Boiko continued his anti-Soviet activity, according to Grishko. On 30 June 1954, Boiko conducted an illegal meeting of anti-Soviet Pentecostal sectarians in the woods of Holosiiv (on the wooded, southern edge of the city of Kiev). There, according to Grishko, Boiko instructed the Pentecostals on ‘methods of conspiratorial work’ and appealed to them not to be intimidated but to be more active. Moreover, Grishko continued, in private conversations Boiko told his fellow Pentecostals that while in the Gulag, he did not stop his ‘anti-Soviet’ activity: on Sundays he baptized new members of the sect and used the camp’s bath for this purpose.²⁶

A perusal of Boiko’s case file reveals a very different person, however.²⁷ He was deeply and genuinely committed to his faith. In 1946, when he was 22 and still serving in the military, he was taken gravely ill. He prayed to God and, according to him, was cured. He was re-born as a Christian.

²⁵ Ibid., op. 24, spr. 3599, ark. 140.

²⁶ Ibid., ark. 141–2.

²⁷ Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhby bezpeky Ukrayiny, spr. 6759ofp.

He then voluntarily joined the Church of Pentecostals (which had been invigorated by the infusion of believers from the newly incorporated territory of the western borderlands of the Soviet Union). After his release from the military in 1947, he plunged into a religious life.

He was arrested in late 1948 on the political charges already described by Grishko. He was suspected of being mentally ill, however. Soviet authorities considered his ‘shaking,’ ‘glossolalia,’ and other normal Pentecostal behaviours to be ‘abnormal.’ Declared by psychiatric experts as incompetent for trial because of mental ‘illness,’ Boiko was confined in a psychiatric hospital for more than two years. After a re-evaluation in 1951 that judged him to have ‘recovered’ enough to stand trial, his case was reopened. He denied all the charges against him. As some point, like Vasilii Belokon’ in the 1952 Adventist case, Boiko refused to sign records of interrogation.

At his trial held in 1952, Boiko pleaded not guilty. The trial itself was simple and short, with not a single witness called to the court. Boiko contested the allegation that his Pentecostal group operated illegally.²⁸ No evidence of anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda was presented to the court, which nevertheless convicted him.

After his rebirth as a believer, Boiko devoted his life to his faith and not to his country. Politics did not interest him. Deeply devout, he did not fear intimidation and threat by the secret police. For this, the young veteran of the Second World War was judged to have committed crimes against the state.

In spite of Grishko’s complaint, however, on 31 August 1954, the Supreme Court of Ukraine reviewed the case and reaffirmed its earlier decision on Boiko.²⁹ Towards the end of the Soviet Union, like the fourteen Adventists discussed above, Boiko was officially exonerated.

Stalin had kept an extremely tight rein on Soviet society before the Second World War. He had to loosen this control, if only slightly, to fight the war. Moreover, as Mikhail Gefter has noted, the extreme conditions of war had a liberalizing impact on the Soviet population: ‘This [1941–2] was a period of spontaneous *de-Stalinization*. We were in full crisis.

²⁸ Initially the Pentecostals joined the government-sponsored Protestant church union. Subsequently many of the Pentecostals left it, and their faith was virtually outlawed. See chapter 2, p. 40.

²⁹ Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhby bezpeky Ukrayiny, spr. 67590fp, ark. 147.

Stalin's totalitarian system had fallen apart in the face of the invasion and occupation. People were suddenly forced to make their own decisions, to take responsibility for themselves. Events pressed us into becoming truly independent human beings.³⁰ The war itself turned the Soviet Union from an isolated sleeping giant into a world superpower. Stalin could no longer control the country as he had before the war. Even though he successfully fought a brutal war against the Ukrainian nationalists,³¹ he had to face the daunting consequence of the war experience itself. Tens of millions of people, liberated from the Soviet regime if only for a year or two, had lived under a foreign power. After the war, millions of Soviet soldiers and civilians (among whom were some of the defendants at the Bila Tserkva trial) returned from captivity and slave labour. They brought with them a multitude of new ideas, concepts, and attitudes towards life.

People became more assertive after the war.³² In 1948 A.G. Mel'nicchuk of Kiev lodged a complaint with Soviet authorities on behalf of his sister, L.I. Bychkova, a librarian in Zhytomyr. Bychkova was not a member of the Komsomol (Young Communist League). When she was asked why she had not joined it, she answered that she would not, for she was a religious believer. It turned out that she belonged to a circle of Baptists. Thereupon, she was fired from her work. Mel'nicchuk protested the dismissal as unjust. The dismissal was judged by Soviet authorities as 'tactless': Bychkova should not have been fired, but transferred to a different job.³³ Such a complaint would have been unthinkable before the war.

The Gulag itself became a crucible of ideas, concepts, and attitudes alien to the Soviet system. In one way or another, these ideas seeped out of the Gulag into Soviet society in general, brought home by inmates upon their release. Even before Stalin's death, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn and others have shown, the Gulag became increasingly unruly.

The incorporation of new territories such as Western Ukraine and the Baltic states meant that new ideas, concepts, and attitudes spread to wide

³⁰ M.Ia. Gefter, quoted in Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York, 1994), 65.

³¹ See Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 2001).

³² Weiner, *ibid.*, discusses this well. Even Ukrainian officials did not always toe Moscow's line in cultural and historical matters. See Serhy Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination* (Toronto, 2004).

³³ TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 23, spr. 5377, ark. 46–7.

areas of the Soviet Union through human interaction.³⁴ Many Protestant religious groups in the Soviet Union were invigorated in the process.

Even though the Soviet people became more vocal in Stalin's last years than before, the vast majority kept silent in order to live. How many of the 'silent majority,' like the Adventists of Bila Tserkva discussed in this book, preserved private inner lives separate from the invasive official world? No doubt many did, even though exactly how many is impossible to know.

After Stalin

It was only after Stalin's death, however, that the Soviet people began to challenge the regime directly. The political terror of the government dramatically declined. This, in turn, opened up the possibility for dissent.

Even after Stalin's death, many religious denominations still toed the official line, registering with the government, obliging their members to perform all civil and military duties like other Soviet citizens, upholding Soviet patriotism, and paying allegiance to the Soviet state. Indeed, Nikita Khrushchev, who succeeded Stalin, launched a brutal anti-religious campaign once he consolidated his power in the late 1950s. Even though mass terror did not accompany Khrushchev's campaign, it was as vicious as Stalin's.³⁵ Intimidation and threat never disappeared, and informers and provocateurs were still deployed widely. As perceptive Soviet Baptists noted on 1963,

So as to implement persecution on such a scale (as it was in the 1930s) and in order to select the more active believers, instead of seizing them at random, the agents of the GPU, NKVD and later the KGB (secret police) penetrated all facets of the Church's organizational life. Thus, under the threat of repressions, they enlisted shaky and weak ministers of the Church, as well as ordinary believers. The government agents wanted answers to the following questions: Where is the next church service to be? Who will preach? Who are the members of the church council? Which preachers have come from outside? Who has made any

³⁴Volodymyr Zabihai, *Zustrich z Ukrainoiu: Spohady* (Sevastopol, 2001), for example, describes such an interaction well.

³⁵See Dimitry V. Pospielovsky, *Soviet Antireligious Campaigns and Persecutions* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1988), chap. 6.

trips and to what places? Who has preached a call to resistance? Who has been praying for the imprisoned brethren? . . . Government authorities were moulding the church councils of the local congregations as though they were of clay. They were selecting senior presbyters for the regions and republics from among their own trusted men.³⁶

A few individuals and groups did learn to stand up in the relatively lenient period of the post-Stalin years, a period called the ‘thaw’ following the dark and freezing winter of Stalin’s terror.

How did the thaw affect the lives of those fourteen Adventists tried in Bila Tserkva? Did they become more open and active in observance of divine law? Unfortunately, one has no answer to these interesting questions. Certainly, Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaign did not extinguish religion. Rather, as Catherine Wanner has argued, Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization campaign ‘inadvertently revitalized evangelical communities’ by releasing their leaders from the Gulag.³⁷ These leaders then came in contact with people like those discussed in the present book who sustained their faith throughout the brutal years of Stalin’s reign. It was thanks, to a significant degree, to the survival of the faith of such people that the human rights movement was able to build a quiet momentum after Stalin’s death.³⁸

Indeed, religious nonconformism became one of the most important pillars of the Soviet dissident movement. Vladimir Andreevich Shelkov (1905–80) is a good example. Born into a Baptist family in southern Ukraine (Velyka Vyska, Kirovohrad Oblast’), he converted to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the 1920s and was ordained a pastor in 1927. When the church split in 1928, he took the side of Reformed Adventists who refused to compromise with the Soviet regime. He was arrested in

³⁶ Michael Bourdeaux, *Faith on Trial in Russia* (New York, 1971), 55.

³⁷ Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca, NY, 2007), 66. In the Brezhnev era (1964–82), which followed Khrushchev’s rule, other factors such as Western culture and rock music also inadvertently contributed to the growth of popular religiosity in Ukraine. See Sergei I. Zhuk, ‘Religion, “Westernization,” and Youth in the “Closed City” of Soviet Ukraine, 1964–84,’ *The Russian Review* 67:4 (2008), 661–79, and Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960–1985* (Washington, DC, 2010), chap. 11.

³⁸ See Iurii Daniiliuk and Oleh Bazhan, *Opozytsiya v Ukrayini (druha polovyna 50-kh–80-ti rr. XX st.)* (Kiev, 2000).

1931 and was sentenced to three years of exile, which he served in the northern Urals. After he was released in 1934, according to one account, he 'spent the next ten years in hiding, constantly changing his address to avoid persecution and arrest, especially after 1936, when he was elected deputy chairman of the All-Union Church of True and Free Seventh Day Adventists. Between 1934 and 1945 he changed his place of residence 12 times.'³⁹ This is an extraordinary story of someone with a tainted political past successfully avoiding the Stalinist terror machine for more than a decade. The authenticity of this account cannot be confirmed, however. Nor can the circumstances of his election as deputy chairman of the True and Free Adventist Union in 1936.

According to an account by his wife Vera Fedorovna, Shelkov travelled around the country during the Great Terror and after and avoided arrest. As it turns out, the couple was surrounded by police agents and informers. In 1941 Shelkov was almost arrested by the police in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, but narrowly escaped.⁴⁰

The Second World War found Shelkov and the chairman of the All-Union Church of True and Free Seventh Day Adventist Church, Prokofii Manzhura, living in Piatigorsk, Stavropol' Region, in southern Russia, which was occupied by German forces from August 1942 to January 1943. They lived under the German occupation, but what they did during the occupation and after is not known. Immediately after Piatigorsk was liberated, Shelkov was arrested by the Soviet police, only to be released three days later. Shortly thereafter, Shelkov baptized Aleksei Murkin (who was born in 1922 to an Adventist family and subsequently became an important figure in the True and Free Adventist Church in the Soviet Union). Faced with conscription into the Red Army, Murkin consulted Shelkov, who advised him to go underground. Murkin followed Shelkov's advice, but in 1947 he was arrested owing to a police agent among the Reformed Adventists.⁴¹ In May 1945 Shelkov and Manzhura were arrested again by Soviet authorities. Shelkov was sentenced to death in 1946, but subsequently the sentence was commuted to ten years in the Gulag. (He was said to be accused of collaborating with the German occupiers, but

³⁹Sapiets, *True Witness*, 69.

⁴⁰Mitrokhin, ed., *Dokumenty*, 33.

⁴¹Ibid., 66–7, 280, and 283.

officially he was not charged with treason.)⁴² He served the sentence in Karaganda, northern Kazakhstan, and was released six months early in 1954, thanks to the post-Stalin amnesty. Manzhura died in the Gulag in Gor'kii (today's Nizhnii Novgorod), Russia, in 1949.

In 1957, Shelkov was arrested again, along with his son-in-law. He was sentenced to ten years for 'anti-Soviet agitation'.⁴³ Released in 1967, Shelkov went underground in 1969, only to be re-arrested in 1978 and sentenced to five years. Two years later, he died in a labour camp near Iakutsk in northern Siberia. He was 75 years of age.⁴⁴

Shelkov penned many works, which were published underground in the Soviet Union and abroad. His uncompromising stance inspired many a believer, and 'trials of "sectarians" who would not take the military oath' became fairly common.⁴⁵ Shelkov's intransigent stance towards the Soviet government also inspired political dissidents and advocates of human rights in the Soviet Union. He was far from the only religious dissident in the Soviet Union. Some Baptists, Pentecostals, Orthodox Christians, and others assumed equally principled positions towards the atheist regime.⁴⁶ Yet Shelkov appears to have occupied a special place among them. The prominent poet and dissident Aleksandr Ginzburg (1936–2002), who was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1979, recalled Shelkov from the time he served his sentence in the Gulag in Mordovia in the 1960s:

I met Shelkov during my second sentence in a Soviet concentration camp. And I would say Shelkov played the decisive role in my own moral training as a human being. Now I have been a Russian Orthodox since I was 13, and I don't think I'll ever become an Adventist, but to this day I remain very much under the influence of this miracle . . . It is due to the influence of Shelkov that when I became a member of the Helsinki Watch Group that I decided to observe the movements of the smaller denomina-

⁴²Ibid., 230 and 283.

⁴³Sapiets, *True Witness*, 69–71 and *Khronika tekushchikh sobytiy*, vyp. 49 (14 May 1978), 56–7.

⁴⁴Sapiets, *True Witness*, 218. Sapiets states that Shelkov was 85 years old at the time of his death, but it turned out that his age was a myth: Shelkov's birth date was somehow antedated by 10 years by his followers. See Mitrokhin, ed., *Dokumenty*, 8.

⁴⁵Sapiets, *True Witness*, 83.

⁴⁶See Liudmila Alekseeva, *Istoriia inokomyслия в СССР: Новейший период* (Moscow, 2001), 150–204.

tions: the Baptists, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals which comprise about 5% of the Soviet populations.⁴⁷

The champion of human rights in the Soviet Union and the father of the Soviet hydrogen bomb, Andrei Sakharov took special interest in Shelkov and his associates. In 1979 he even flew to Tashkent from Moscow in an attempt to attend their trial. He subsequently noted that their life was 'a life that breeds strength of character.'⁴⁸

Shelkov's intransigence and even radicalism alienated some like-minded Adventists in the Soviet Union, however. These Adventists remained critical of Shelkov and his supporters: 'Their attitude toward the authorities was defiant to the point that, with their publishing equipment kept in secret places, they issued booklets that were hostile toward the government. As these publications were mistakenly attributed to the Reform Movement, because the police could not easily distinguish one group from the other, our people were often persecuted, not only for their faith, but also for the misdeeds of others. Also, the SDA [Seventh-Day Adventist] Church often blamed our church for certain teachings, attitudes, and actions represented by other people who had nothing to do with our church.'⁴⁹

Certainly, Shelkov and his supporters were 'hostile toward the government.' They noted in defence of political dissidents in 1978: 'It would not be possible to slander this despotic system, for it has on its conscience

⁴⁷ From his speech given at La Sierra University in California on 13 November 1979: See Bonnie Dwyer, 'Back in the USSR: A Surprising Story of an Adventist Miracle,' *La Sierra Today*, Winter 1979, 3. The Helsinki Watch Groups was a Soviet human rights organization set up to monitor the Soviet Union's compliance with the 1975 Helsinki accords, which the country signed along with almost all European countries, the United States, and Canada. The accords, a result of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe held in Helsinki in 1975, stipulated, among other things, the recognition of universal human rights.

⁴⁸ Andrei Sakharov, *Memoirs* (New York, 1990), 493. For Shelkov and the True and Free Adventists, see also Alekseeva, 177–87, Ludmilla Alexeyeva, 'The Human-Rights Movement and the True and Free Adventists,' *Spectrum* 19:2 (1988), 25–32 and Mitrokhin, ed., *Dokumenty*, 160–2.

⁴⁹ Balbach, *History of the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement*, 399. Those people critical of Shelkov and his followers appear to be those loyal to the international Reform Adventist group of which the Soviet Reformists had long disapproved since the 1920s. See chapter 2, p. 48. For the mainstream Seventh-Day Adventist Church, which itself was far from united, see A.F. Parasei and N.A. Zhukaliuk, *Bednaia, brosaemaiia bureiu . . . : Istoricheskie ocherki k 110-letnemu iubileiu Tserkvi adventistov sed'mogo dnia v Ukraine* (Kiev, 1997).

real crimes against humanity which are simply indescribable . . . The true information put out by us and all those oppressed by the state atheist dictatorship and KGB represents just tiny crumbs of the reality still experienced by our people.'⁵⁰ They created an Adventist religious rights group: the ‘Group for Legal Struggle against the Dictatorship of State Atheism and for Investigation of Prosecution of Believers in the USSR.’⁵¹

Shelkov and his supporters used Lenin’s authority as a safeguard in order to press their point: ‘V.I. Lenin understood perfectly well that the refusal of believers to bear arms was not a malicious refusal to carry out civil obligations, but was a matter of conscience . . . He described state repression of pacifist believers because of their faithfulness to the commandment “do not kill” as “a dreadful Asiatic despotism, completely unimaginable in a civilized country.”’⁵² In the end, however, everything came to the issue of Soviet law versus divine law. As Shelkov and his followers noted: ‘Society and state should be built, not on violence against the individual, but on recognition of and respect for individual rights and freedoms. Such reasonable, just and fully human decisions and laws are based on the Highest Divine Law and the principles of the Kingdom of God.’⁵³ Of course, the Soviet laws rejected the ‘Highest Divine Law’:

In reality, it is not our religious writings, our legal struggle or our lawful activities which discredit the Soviet state and social system. What brings shame on our state and our Soviet system is the obvious contradiction between the laws of our country and freedom of conscience, religion and conviction, the constant campaign of persecution against loyal and free religious citizens on the basis of unjust, arbitrary and disgraceful laws.⁵⁴

Soviet authorities reasoned in a similar vein, with a twist: the struggle was in fact one of world-historical, even cosmic, significance, between the Soviet laws (which, they felt, were historically just and progressive) and the ‘anti-Soviet’ divine law (which, they insisted, was historically unjust and obscurantist). In trying Shelkov at the Soviet court of justice in 1979, the Soviet government summoned a witness, a former Adventist follower of

⁵⁰ Quoted in Sapiets, *True Witness*, 96–7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 116.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

Shelkov, in order to make the case against him. The prosecution prompted the witness to answer the question ‘What laws were you forbidden to obey?’: ‘We were forbidden to obey all Soviet laws in general. All laws. We had to obey only God’s Law.’⁵⁵

One does not know for sure whether Fedorchuk, Il’chenko, Gavriliuk, the Glivaskaia sisters, and other Adventists tried in 1952 in Bila Tserkva privately reasoned likewise – in terms of a struggle between two incompatible laws. However, one knows for certain the outcome of the struggle: the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, whereas religion is thriving in the former Soviet republics.⁵⁶ Divine law would appear to have outlived the Soviet laws.

⁵⁵ Mitrokhin, ed., *Dokumenty*, 177.

⁵⁶ On contemporary religious affairs in today’s Ukraine, see Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*.

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